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## ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "HIRELL."

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"THIS is a striking book, clever, interesting, and original. It is far above the common run of novels or of novelettes, and can scarcely fail to attract attention. To those, indeed, who confine their reading solely to tales of fashionable life, who are incapable of feeling any sympathy with a hero who is beneath the rank of a Count, or of taking any interest in a heroine who is not, at least, a Baroness in her own right, and who expect the third volume to end in an unlimited display of lace and diamonds, and a rent-roll of £20,000 a-year at the very lowest computation, this simple story of 'Abel Drake's Wife' may appear unworthy of perusal. But to all who take pleasure in the study of human nature, to all who are capable of recognising true nobility, even in the person of a poor factory-girl, or of detecting one of 'nature's gentlemen' in the disguise of a humble adventurer, this work will be heartily welcome. We have seldom met with a book so thoroughly true to life, so deeply interesting in its detail, and so touching in its simple pathos, as 'Abel Drake's Wife.'"

—*Athenæum*.



# H I R E L L.

A Nobel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE."

"If the first among the problems of life be how to establish the peace and restore the balance of the inward being——"

"I know not what true definition there is for any age or people of the highest excellence of any kind, unless it be perpetual effort upward in pursuit of an object higher than ourselves, higher than our works, higher even than our hopes, yet beckoning us on from hour to hour, and always permitting us to apprehend in part."

"It is, I think, an observation of St. Augustine, that those periods are critical and formidable, when the power of putting questions runs greatly in advance of the pains to answer them. Such appears to be the period in which we live."

W. E. GLADSTONE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:  
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1869.

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To the AUTHOR of the MOTTOES which appear on the  
title-page of this work,—to The Right Honourable  
W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P., First Lord of the Treasury,  
&c., &c.,—the following pages are Dedicated with  
the profound respect of

JOHN SAUNDERS.

•



## P R E F A C E.

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VARIOUS circumstances combined to make the *serial* publication of Hirell little more than a rough sketch of the author's design.

He has, therefore, thought it his duty before placing his work in a more permanent form, not simply to revise, or re-write, but to treat the whole as materials simply for the creation of a new book.

Of the nine hundred and forty-four pages contained in the present three volumes, at least two hundred and twenty appear now for the first time ; including nineteen chapters—which, with but inconsiderable exceptions, are entirely new.



## CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

---

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. JOHN RYMER CUNLIFF . . . . .	1
II. WAITING FOR AN ANSWER . . . . .	14
III. A LONDON TWILIGHT . . . . .	38
IV. EXHALATIONS OF THE DAWN . . . . .	49
V. PASSING GLIMPSES . . . . .	57
VI. OVER CRIBA BAN . . . . .	75
VII. DOLGARROG . . . . .	90
VIII. DOLA' HUDOL . . . . .	112
IX. THE ANSWERING CHORD . . . . .	131
X. THE MAIDEN'S LAKE . . . . .	147
XI. THE HOME OF THE PEACE-MAKER . . . . .	177
XII. BOD ELIAN . . . . .	190
XIII. ELIAS MORGAN'S FEAST . . . . .	207
XIV. ROBERT CHAMBERLAYNE DOES ELIAS MORGAN YET ANOTHER SERVICE . . . . .	233
XV. MR. RYMER'S FIRST NIGHT AT BOD ELIAN . . . . .	239
XVI. HIRELL . . . . .	269
XVII. A BEAM OF LIGHT . . . . .	281



# H I R E L L.

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## CHAPTER I.

JOHN RYMER CUNLIFF.

THERE are no dreamers like unimaginative people. With such persons dreams remain to the last pure dreams. They have no power to make the actual grow out of the ideal; and Nature, in a kind of divine foresight and pity, compensates them by keeping up this inner light; which, however feeble and discoloured, warms and cheers, even though there be no window in the sanctuary of the soul through which the rays may pass out to guide the benighted steps. Faithful to the last they dream, touchingly unconscious of the process. They could not tell anything,



perhaps, if asked. But not the less do they dream, and dream on, of what will never be ; and thus assert their share in the profounder instincts of humanity. But they also toil on, along the roughest, the dryest, and the dustiest of roads ; patient and enduring ; and never think to complain that such things should be in their hearts if they may not realise them.

But there are men whose dreams, no matter how wide and glorious their scope, are ever monitions to duty ; who see their thoughts return to them, as the messenger returned to Joshua, laden with tokens of the Promised Land, and who know they can go and take possession if they will. Not without heroic discipline of self, perhaps ; certainly not without great and protracted effort. But they can do it. They do not. Again they are tempted, and yet again. Every faculty cries out to them for leave to do its own proper work, to grow strong, healthy, victorious. But the reluctant feet still cling to the familiar soil. The eyes, dazzled for a moment, turn away, and see all things more dubiously. The lips answer, " Yes, but not now."

And Nature deals with these men, too—

justly, not pityingly. They are the worst of traitors to her! And she so loved them! So poured upon them her choicest gifts! She leaves them to their fate. And they are, or try to believe themselves to be, happy; for they no longer dream those disturbing dreams.

She leaves them. Yes, as the sun leaves the tropical forest at eve, stifling in its own rankness, a prey to a thousand unclean things. And yet how beautiful many of them are? One doesn't see them properly in the open, harsh, unsympathetic daylight. It hurts the eye, too, so much looking at the sun. We see well enough here, after all. The soul, like the eye, soon accommodates itself to a soft, luxurious gloom. Who knows but it may shut out unpleasant objects, and bring nearer to us things we may like? Besides, we are modest, and prefer that some things should be veiled. Let us look around and enjoy while we can. Let us take the goods our toiling sires provide. What wealth we have! What leisure! What infinite opportunities for active gratification! What delicious couches for repose! And—yes, once more we can

dream sweet dreams, from which it is a pain to awake.

The light streams from the little conservatory on his face—on John Cunliff's face, as it bends over his writing-desk in his luxurious bachelor apartments, overlooking one of the parks. The light, being that of the September noon-day, is strong, and shows the face more truthfully than flatteringly, thus:—A long face, with a colourless complexion, light hair, parted in the middle of the head, and falling rather long, as in the earliest Anglo-Saxon portraits; not golden hair, or chesnut brown, but only pale, dead brown. A straight, long nose; lips full, firm, well-shaped, flexible, expressive. A long chin, with a small, pointed beard. Surely there must be large and brilliant eyes to ennoble and glorify so seemingly common-place a countenance?

He looks up from his writing towards the flowers in the conservatory. The eyes are not even blue, nor dark, nor large. Grey, with green lights in them as they look towards the sun; keen as an eagle's; bright, and like the lips, expressive; a little darker and more

tender in colour when bent again contemplatively on the writing, but not handsome eyes at any time, if studied only for themselves ; and yet the face as a whole is good, original, and in some of its aspects has a certain massive and melancholy beauty, caused by no particular feature ;—unless, indeed, by the broad, smooth, finely-rounded brow—but due to the perfect harmony of all.

What is he doing ?

It is a question that apparently he would not care to have put to him even in look, for when the man-servant enters with coals, Mr. Cunliff slides his letter under the hollow of his desk-slope ; and appears to be busily engaged, with elbows propped on the desk, studying a large photograph from one of the Hampton Court cartoons that he has just purchased, and mounted straight before him beyond his desk, by the aid of a pile of books, at a suitable angle for examination ; and towards which his eye had unconsciously turned at every pause in his letter-writing, as if with a true artistic love. When the servant has gone out he draws forth the letter. Then, after a pause, he rises, goes to the door, and

locks it. Still dissatisfied, he unlocks it, rings the bell, and when the man comes, says—

“Mind! I am at home to no one to-day.”

“Except, sir, I suppose to——”

“To no one!”

“Very well, sir. I’ll take care.”

This time the door was not locked after the servant, and the work at the desk recommenced.

What is he doing?

Can we discover for ourselves by watching him!

The human face is always one of the most attractive, but also one of the most perplexing of problems. Lavater, no doubt, was right enough in his theory that the character is to be seen in the countenance. But then we need an angel to read it for us, and keep us from making the most dangerous mistakes. What, we might ask, could be clearer than the passions that express themselves in the looks and gestures of two men engaged in a deadly struggle; deadly to life, or to reputation, or to one’s dearest hopes? Surely there, if anywhere, we might hope to find the perfect outward manifestations of those inward forces

which so jealously shun the light? But no. Neither of the combatants forgets, for an instant, that the other's eye is upon him ; and that consciousness modifies, perhaps even falsifies, all expression.

But there is a position in which the student of physiognomy may revel to his soul's content. It is that of a man, who, believing himself free from observation, is writing a letter which stirs his nature to the depths, and which may affect his whole future. And such a letter, it is impossible to doubt, John Cunliff is now engaged on.

Can it be that he is in debt and serious danger? No. Men don't lock their doors, even for an instant, against a servant in order to answer a creditor. Nor do they spend half-an-hour over the turn of a single sentence in writing to him. Neither do they tear up sheet after sheet, and pause again and again, as if hopeless of self-satisfaction in style ; and pace up and down the room with nervous irritable gestures, before sitting down once more to the apparently unconquerable task.

No, John Cunliff's difficulty is not one of debt. What then ?

Is he discovering that the beautiful fruit which was held to his lips when he entered the world eight years ago—independent in purse, radiant with youth, energy, enthusiasm, and the honours of a successful university career—this fruit of pleasure of which he has been eating ever since, with palate growing less keen, but habit growing more exacting,—is he discovering, at last, as he gets to a core, having exhausted bloom, and rind, and pulp, that the essence of all is but a bitter ash? Is that his discovery? And is he sitting down in the first hours of remorse to unwind the toils that hold him fast; and beginning to tell the truth with all fit considerateness to others whose fate is involved with his own? No. For even the most considerate of beings will, at such times of domestic revolution, think chiefly of themselves, and make short work of others' sacrifices while striving to complete their own.

But may not this still be his true position, only that there is an addition to be made? Perhaps he intends to reward himself for his self-denial. Or rather he, perhaps prudently, won't over-estimate his own heroism; and in-

tends, while turning from the Delilahs of life—the typical Delilahs only, let us say—to take to himself a beautiful and virtuous spouse, provided only she will consent? An excellent resolve—but not in the least resembling John Cunliff's. Else why the lowering expression on that naturally frank face; the almost furtive glances towards the door of so fearless an eye; or the peculiar colouring of his cheeks, that has partly driven off the ordinary pallor, and which seems to suggest, you hardly know how or why, the idea of a man engaged in a terrible struggle, that yet has nothing in it of the noble, or even of the self-respecting? Never did a man sit down to write an honest and manly love-letter and bear the while an aspect like John Cunliff's.

He must have been insulted; or, worse still, have himself given mortal offence, and he now offers or accepts a challenge. But the days of duelling are past; and men either summon or are summoned to the Divorce Court; accept or compel refuge with the police; or arbitrate their rights and wrongs at *Nisi Prius*. They don't agree to fight. Besides, there breaks through the powerful



restraint that one sees John Cunliff imposes on himself occasional glimpses of an extraordinary change of feeling. Chaos suddenly changes into creation. All his unpleasant thoughts seem to die, and pleasant ones to spring up into vivid and attractive life. And then he walks about the room with an elastic step ; glances at his favourite pictures on the walls, which always send him with new zest to his Raphael photograph ; or he goes into the conservatory to see what new plants the florist has brought in the weekly exchange for those gone out of bloom ; but pauses unthinkingly, and yet full of thought over a rose so long, that one gets the notion he has forgotten all anxieties, and is abandoning himself to some fascinating day-dream.

What, then, is he doing ? Why simply writing a short, and surely very innocent letter ; if this be all :—

“ I hear you have half accepted Lady Selton’s invitation to go back with her into the country after her hasty visit to town ; that she goes very early to-morrow morning ; and that she thinks you will come to her this

evening *prepared* to stay. If she does not see you this evening, she will conclude you refuse to go. I ventured to say you had expressed so much pleasure at the thought that I was sure you would accept. If so, may I not hope to see you later in her drawing-room, that I may explain how I have fulfilled the slight commission with which you honoured me? Or, as I must myself make a call in your neighbourhood about eight 'o'clock, may I, if I should have the good fortune to come across your carriage on its way to Lady Sellon's, venture to ask to be taken in? I shall not add much to the weight of your trunks. By-the-bye, what an exquisite *carte-de-visite* of yourself was that which you showed so reluctantly yesterday; and which, but for Lady Sellon's kind treachery, would have remained unknown to us all. You gave away copies, but did not give one to me. I did not ask then, it is true. Now I do. I wait anxiously to know if you forgive the request."

Surely an innocent letter! But why is it unsigned? Why is there no indication of the name of the lady to whom it is addressed?

Obviously it is a lady to whom John Cunliff writes.

He must be one of the least conceited of men, to be so unwilling, even now, when he has got a fair and completed copy after innumerable failures, to read it over and over so many times, and always with increasing dissatisfaction. To judge from his attitude—his head supported on his left arm, which is elbowed on the desk, looking sideways at the letter which the right hand has drawn away and holds up just a little while, resting on the farthest part of the slope—there is not a sentence or a thought in it over which he does not hold a mental cavil; and which he only leaves unaltered because he dares not embark on a new attempt, and is hopeless of improving the texture if he did.

“It must go as it is—or not at all,” he says to himself.

One more pause—the open letter on the slope, elbows on each side, hands clasped and drawn down over the eyes as if to shut out the too brilliant light from the conservatory—and shut in the letter while a last thoughtful look at it is taken.

Suddenly he breaks the pause ; encloses the letter in an envelope, addresses it, and two minutes later drops it into the post-office letter-box, saying to himself, with a half smile—

“That settles my part of the business, at any rate. Six hours will tell me all the rest.”

## CHAPTER II.

### WAITING FOR AN ANSWER.

WHEN the letter had been dropped into the box, Cunliff stood for a moment in the street, irresolute—then turned towards a shop to purchase some gloves, but suddenly hurried back to his rooms, as if wishing neither to see nor be seen. On his way he met a respectable-looking man, evidently fresh from a journey, who stopped and bowed with marked respect.

“Jarman! You in London! Anything the matter?” asked Cunliff, stretching out his hand.

“No, sir—no. But as you were so anxious about the payment into the bank to-day, I thought I’d come myself, with all I have been able to collect.”

Cunliff looked as if he could have dispensed with this personal attention on the part of

his obsequious agent; whose inclined head, subdued attitude of deference, upward side-glance from a bright, brown eye, and respectful words, only called forth a rough, "Oh, very well!" and then Cunliff turned on his heel, leaving Mr. Jarman to follow as he pleased. That gentleman accordingly hung back just enough to admit of conversation without seeming to claim intimate acquaintance.

"And how much have you got for me?" demanded Cunliff, the moment the door was closed upon them in his own room.

"A little less than sixteen hundred pounds."

"You mean beyond what must go to the mortgages?"

"I am sorry to say, sir, inclusive of that."

"You didn't sell the timber, then?"

"The best of it; but it only fetched four hundred and ten pounds."

Cunliff looked at the agent, and his face darkened.

"I assure you, sir," said the agent, "I have done my best to force in all arrears, even under painful circumstances——"

"I told you, Mr. Jarman," interrupted Cunliff, in a rapid, impetuous tone, "I did not wish to hurt deserving people among my tenants."

"Yes, sir, I understood that ; and I hope I have drawn the arrears I refer to with as little damage as was possible."

"You must go into this matter more fully with me."

"Oh, certainly ! Now ?"

"N—o, not to-day ! I'm busy."

"Of course, sir, any time will do for that."

Cunliff glanced at the agent, then turned away moodily. Nothing could the agent say that did not jar. His employer looked so thoroughly dissatisfied that it was a wonder he ventured on his next theme :—

"I had, sir, I must confess, another motive for presenting myself to you to-day."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so ? What is it ? The fact is, Mr. Jarman, I am thoroughly disappointed. I expected at least five hundred more. And when I intimated to you that I might possibly travel, and not find it convenient for a long time to wait for remittances, I did expect you would have

managed better. Sixteen hundred pounds ! Absurd ! Why, half goes for things that, as you know, must be provided for ! But what's this other matter ?”

“ Pardon me for what I am going to say. I have been thinking you might be put out at this unsatisfactory result, and as I have a thousand pounds lying idle, if you will allow me to anticipate your next rents, and——”

“ Jarman, you surprise me ! I didn't expect this. No, thank you. It's very kind—very ! Excuse my ill-temper ; I'm out of sorts. But I don't think I can avail myself of your kindness.”

“ Why, sir, may I ask ?” And Mr. Jarman's attitude of respect and upward side-look of inquiry compelled Cunliff to ask himself the same question—“ Why ?” Not getting any decisive answer, he said—

“ Mind you take interest, till you have repaid yourself !”

“ Yes, sir ; I'll mind that !” said Mr. Jarman, with a rich smile overspreading his face, which seemed to say for them both — As if he were the man to forget !

“ You won't care about my being inhos-



pitable?" said Cunliff. "If I do decide to go, I shall start this very evening."

"Pray don't mention it, sir!"

"Of course you noted my request?"

"Not to say anything about your journey?"

"Yes: not till you know I am off."

"I have been, and will be, very careful."

"Oh, it's merely this: two or three different things are tempting me into new expenses at home, and so I'm half inclined to join a military friend on a continental tour, and economise."

Something tickled Mr. Jarman's throat, and caused him to cough; but he only looked red and discomposed when Mr. Cunliff stared at him, and said—

"Have we done for the day, then?"

"Hem! yes. One thing I will just mention—merely that you may, when at leisure, kindly take it into consideration."

"And that is——?" asked Cunliff, wondering at the agent's hesitation.

"The cottages, sir—the labourers' and the workmen's cottages——" Mr. Jarman spoke

in a low and confidential tone that particularly irritated the listener.

“Well?”

“They are getting bad, and people talk, and there’s some illness—not much, but a little. You’ll forgive my mentioning it, sir?”

“Of course. Quite right. I ought to have attended to this before. But I couldn’t see my way to doing the business effectually. So, Jarman, I must get you to draw me up a comprehensive report, and add your own suggestions.”

“I beg pardon—I did so, and sent it to you about a year ago.”

“Did you? Oh, very good. I can’t stop now; neither can I just now spare a sixpence. But it shall be seen to. Say so if you like.”

“And the money?”

“Pay all into the bank, instantly. Thank you! I wish you good-bye in case we don’t meet again for the present.”

Mr. Jarman shook hands as he always did with his “superiors,” that is, he managed by the very set of his shoulders, and the movement of his apologetic hands, to express how highly he felt the compliment, without at the

same time doing aught that a bystander could have charged against him as fulsome or unmanly. Indeed, Mr. Jarman gave the impression of a gentleman who had only bent his mind to circumstances, but with a little more than ordinary determination as to the *bend*, and as to the subdued and graceful dignity of its manifestation.

It was an odd thing that when Cunliff had got rid of his visitor, happening to entangle his feet in the crimson wool mat at the threshold of his door, he sent it flying towards the open conservatory, and had the satisfaction to hear a crash of falling pots and plants, which made him grind his teeth as he waited for the end—but when it was over, his only comment was—

“I couldn’t refuse without insulting him. Excellent man, and thoroughly detestable!” He then shut the conservatory-door, and forgot all but his immediate cares. And in some such fashion as this was the fabric of his thought:—

“Six hours. One gone. What on earth am I to do with the other five? Five hours, twenty quarters, three hundred minutes—no,

I won't go into the seconds, lest I should turn wild, and lose what little reputation for sanity this day may leave me. And yet, in the name of Heaven, how am I to get through five hours of this?"

To keep down the irritable fit that was taking possession of him, he found or made things to do which in a measure engrossed him. He read a French novel—a rather exciting one—for a few minutes, then threw it away, walked till he was tired, then read again, and so got rid of a couple of hours.

Then he went over his banker's book; and no worn-out clerk of an old-fashioned private bank could have done it more slowly, methodically, or painstakingly. It was as if he felt he was in the mood for mistakes, and mistakes should *not* be made. His strong will carried him successfully through. When he had finished, he dallied a little with his cheque-book in his hand, thinking:—

"If I draw the cheque, I needn't do any more till I know. I must draw it close. The bank won't mind—I may when I'm far off."

He drew the cheque, examined it with minute care—went twice or thrice over it as

if conscious of failing attention, to be sure that no accidental violation of form might cause embarrassment at the last moment, and was about, when satisfied, to put it in his pocket, when he remembered something, and rang the bell.

"George, did the tailor send the things?" he said, as the man entered.

"Yes, sir. They are in the dining-room. Would you like to try any of them on?"

"No. Yes! Bring the waistcoat. The last fitted badly."

The servant brought the waistcoat, and left it on the table. When he had gone, Cunliff, without even a single glance at the shape or quality, changed it for the one he wore; slid his hand into a pocket inside the breast which he had specially ordered; and there ended the trial of the waistcoat, with entire satisfaction to the owner.

Into that coveted pocket he put the cheque; and then, as he stood musing, his eye happened to fall on his ivory card-case, and some loose cards bearing the words—

"MR. JOHN R. CUNLIFF."

He gathered the cards up into the case, and put that with the cheque in his new pocket.

One thought leading to another, he began to hunt for some plain cards and a less showy case ; and having found both, he dropped them carelessly into his coat-pocket. He looked at his watch and spoke aloud.

“Two hours yet ! They will pass ! But it isn’t easy to believe it.”

A spasm of disgust of his own voice drove him to silence, and to the study of the map of the Continent, which hung over the back of a chair in a corner. This interested him. So much so, that he began to make memoranda in pencil, partly from the map, partly from a Murray’s Handbook. And thus, and by beginning to sort the papers taken from his pocket—a week’s accumulation—while casting a sort of half-comic, half-helpless look at the medley in his desk, and instituting an *auto-da-fé* with a wax taper for stake, he whiled away another hour.

Then he could no longer engage in any occupation. He could read nothing ; look at neither plants, pictures, nor photographs. He could not sit still at the table, nor stand

still at the window, whither he went determined to watch the doings of the world without, while comfortably secure the world could not watch his doings within."

To and fro, like a wild beast in his cage, he moved. And, like the beast, seemed to take a desperate pleasure in feeling the bars, by always touching with his foot as he reached it—the touch being very like a kick—the skirting-board that bounded his walks.

"This infernal sun! How hot it is!" he once exclaimed, and drew down the blinds. And then on his next coming to the spot, he drew them up again, and with a change in his manner and aspect, "Somehow, one always needs light in this queer world. And I'm a pretty fellow, to have the impudence to say so, just now. Well! Only forty minutes more to the time when the postman generally makes his rounds. I can fix him to a nicety. I'll bet he's here within the thirty-seven and the forty-two—that's giving him five minutes grace. Yes, and what'll you bet he brings you?"

Silent, John Cunliff? Yes, he is absolutely silent.

The door opens. The servant enters on tiptoe with a confidential smirk.

"I saw Mr. Arnold coming——"

"Not at home! Didn't I say so?" almost gasped Cunliff below his breath.

"Yes, sir," answered the frightened man.

"But, sir, I thought I'd run up and tell you before he spoke——"

"Quick, then!"

The servant hurried out; a little too fast, it seemed, for presently he was heard apologising. Then, as Cunliff advanced to shut the door, he met, at the threshold, Mr. Arnold, with his brown, healthy, vigorous face, volunteer garb, and a superb new rifle in his hand.

"Cunliff, how are you? I found the door open—the hall empty; so I thought I wouldn't stand on ceremony."

"Delighted, I'm sure! But you haven't enlisted—taken the Queen's pay for life, have you?"

"Oh, the rifle and uniform! Just fresh from Wimbledon—on my way home. Private match. Such an exciting one—such a scene! We were done for when they told me to go in and lose, for to go in and win was simply



impossible. Cunliff, old fellow, I did it! I won!"

Mr. Arnold was a tall, robust man, who found it only a sort of profitable and honourable recreation to guide a lucrative business, and become a popular M.P., and who was therefore able to devote the serious business part of his life, with all its responsibilities, to volunteering and manly sports. He was the crack shot of his corps.

To Cunliff's extreme discomfort, Mr. Arnold began to give, in fuller detail, a glowing, almost boyish recital of his triumphs that morning, when he had won the superb Mount-storm rifle he carried in his hand, after a most critical and exciting contest. He finished by saying :—

"But I'll tell you what really did please me. When the thing was done—and, by Jove, I wish you had only heard the shout, and felt the grab, as I was carried off my legs, in spite of most energetic remonstrances of fist and foot—that Lord Bullyblow, as we used to call him at school—Don't you remember him? Why, you polished him off after half-an-hour's struggle, having previously very kindly disposed of me."

"I remember," said Cunliff, with a laugh.

"Well ; though he and I always hated one another as boys, and though he's now a furious Tory, and I——"

"Am now a bitter Radical."

"Perhaps—perhaps not. Well, he was one of the most uproarious. He's left his mark, I can tell you, on my right thigh, with his tremendous grip. I like that, and honour the fellow now, though I held him only as a snob before. But, I say, Cunliff, what's the matter with you ?"

Glad to see his chill responses growing effective at last, Cunliff said :—

"Then you don't know ?"

"What ?"

"That I'm off this evening to the Continent—that is, if certain preliminaries are made easy for me. Travel's expensive, and——"

"For how long ?"

"Can't say. Most likely a year or two."

Mr. Arnold gave a low whistle, and began to look so much concerned that Cunliff wondered.

"Havn't heard worse news, old fellow, for

a good while. I didn't come to tell you all this bosh. Don't you give me credit for being such an ass. No, I came to ask you, have you had enough of this kind of life, a very arduous one, I should imagine ; and are you willing, say only for the novelty of it, to try another ?"

" And that is ?"

" Politics."

John Cunliff shook his head. and laughed, as he replied :—

" Politics don't interest me. Not now, at least. What do I care which side is in or out, when I see both sides are substantially the same. Wait till the American war is over, and then let's see. If the North wins, there'll be a tremendous shaking of the dry bones all over the world sooner or later,\* and then, perhaps :—

" And, then, where shall we be if we don't prepare beforehand ?"

" Who are the *we* ?"

" The Independent Liberals."

" Independent ? Yes, so independent that

\* Written during the earlier portion of the great struggle.

they can never, by any chance, be brought into working union against the enemy. A mere mob of sharpshooters—not a disciplined corps. However, that's not my reason for keeping aloof."

"And what is your reason?"

"Arnold, you know very well that apart from yourself and a few men like you, there isn't in the whole British House of Commons, just now, a particle of earnest faith in any one great or good thing, unless it be in that supremely good thing, the English gentleman, sublimated by squirearchy, and by an undying devotion to game-laws."

"Grant all that, and then? Do you think that if I am in earnest, and if there may be a few others also in earnest, we ought to be left alone—a prey to the Philistines?"

"Hang it, Arnold! you come too close. And, besides, I haven't time even to think to-day."

"Well, it may give you a twinge or two, I hope most heartily it may, to know that I came to offer you one of the nicest boroughs in England—a place where, if you once get in, they'll never turn you out, nor make you

bleed profusely, either, every time you must be re-elected."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. And if you think our long-standing acquaintance justifies the request, pray pause. I'll say no more, but wait till to-morrow to see whether you go or stay. If you stay, I shall believe the house will obtain a man who can, if he pleases, delight it with his chastened and vigorous eloquence, and yet at the same time obtain and retain the hearts of the people by a breadth of sympathy rare among politicians. The want of our time is a union between the unspoiled but also untrained instincts of the many with the culture, knowledge, and experience of the few."

It was impossible for Cunliff to listen unmoved. At first he thought his friend was speaking so wildly that he asked himself if his speech were not a bitter jest. But he knew why Arnold said these things. He saw in Cunliff not the man of to-day, but the man of the debating club, and of the solitary walk, and of the students' "oil and lamp" of Oxford. Besides, Arnold's tone and manner, so light and conversational, could not prevent

Cunliff from understanding they were the ring of true metal; the man's heart was in his words.

Cunliff's face flushed with pleasure and surprise. It was pleasant for the moment to find that if he had forgotten what might have once been supposed to be his true self, others had not. That was his feeling just for a moment; and then a shadow swept across the face that made Arnold unconsciously turn to see if anything was passing the windows, and darkening them. But the cloud was from within, not from without. With an emotion he did not for once attempt to hide, and which, from its infrequency, was only the more striking to the observer, he said, as he shook his friend cordially by the hand:—

“You are partial. I do not deserve—I could not justify that—that which you say of me. Even the little good you knew of me at college, and which you remember so generously now, has, I fear, died out. The soil was poor, perhaps, and so the showy sprouts have dwindled in the sun. However, that I do value your friendship and good opinion, let me show by saying I will do what you ask.”

"You will? You'll think it over? Even now, before you commit yourself to anything else?"

"I will."

"Thanks! Good-bye! Stop, Cunliff; do you know people are talking about you and Mrs. Rhys?"

"Damn people!"

"Hem!"

"Let them talk—the idiots!"

"That's very well for you, but——"

"Of course; I didn't mean to be so selfish."

"Of course, of course. And I know there's nothing in it, or I should fight shy of this talk."

"Nothing in the world. I am bound to say that for the lady's sake."

The men looked at each other, shook hands, and parted.

"He'll know all, I suppose, to-morrow," was Cunliff's secret comment on this. "Pleasant!"

He looked at his watch and started. Only ten minutes now. Ten. The postman was due in that time. Could he do better than

spend the brief interval in weighing Arnold's proposal? He felt more disturbed about it than he could quite understand. He took up his waiting place. It was the top step of the conservatory. From thence his eye commanded just a few yards of the open space across which the postman must pass. He never moved till he saw the man, but leaned his back against the lintel of the door, and drew out a cigar, intending to smoke it, as he often did, in this place; but he never lighted it. He only, in the intervals of his painful thought, pierced it with his penknife—stopped, and then again, after a while, resumed the work.

It was a trying time. What he had undertaken to do involved a retrospect inexpressibly painful and humiliating. His instinct had only too accurately warned him to keep off such themes altogether. And the future? Suppose he were even yet to draw back, and use this very election business as an instrument of extrication? Did he feel the spring, the energy, the clearness of aim and faith that would give him reasonable hope of success? No, no, no. He doubted every-



thing, and most of all, himself. He doubted success, even if that which is called so were obtained. Doubted, therefore, whether he ought to succeed ; doubted the way he was going, but also doubted whether it would be any gain to change the direction ; and if it were, he still doubted whether the gain would be worth the inevitable struggle. The fatalism of the time in English politics and in English society had in John Cunliff an adherent whose obedience to the cause was only equalled by his contempt for it.

What fine things Mr. Arnold had managed to say of him, without seeming to be insincere ! But Arnold was a fine fellow, and saw in his friends what he wanted to see, and had in himself. But there might be grains of truth in the appreciation. Was that all to go for nothing ! Could it be—and Cunliff's face changed a little at the thought, and looked decidedly belligerent ; could it be that Arnold knew more than he had chosen to reveal ? Was there a special—and so to say friendly meaning in this visit, which, if fully understood, would explain such unusual demonstrativeness of word and wish ? Was he

consciously interposing at a critical time? Then, with an effort to forget Mrs. Rhys, and reverting to Arnold's words, Cunliff tried in a sort of abstract way to look at himself, and judge whether it was likely he could, if he tried, fulfil such expectations.

Finding little satisfaction in this, he passed, as by an effort of will, to a different theme—what other men thought of him and his “tastes.” These were said to be exquisite. And of himself there had been circulated the remark, that to make an idle gentleman the world had lost a true artist. If he remembered these things now, it was only to ask himself why there seemed ever such a principle of death in his tastes, as well as in the gifts for which Arnold gave him credit. Was he, then, the man to teach the world how to live? Absurd! If, indeed, the answer he expected every instant was unfavourable, then—— An almost audible laugh burst from him—bitter and self-mocking—and distorted his face, as he saw the sudden exposure of his logic. He could not while he looked one way; he could when he looked the other! And though he didn't like to confess it, he

saw that, after all, that solution might be true, however uncomplimentary.

Very well: he accepted it. If she—but that hypothesis needn't be pursued further; for he was then committed to her by all the ties of honour. But if the answer were not of the kind he had—perhaps absurdly—anticipated, then——

“There he is!” he ejaculated aloud, and there was an end to all speculation. The blood came in a rush to his face and brow, as he turned back into the room to meet his man with the letter, if letter there were. There was time enough for an answer—that he knew. He knew, also, that the lady was so occupied as to be sure to have been at home. If there were then no letter, the silence would mean—what? He could not tell—not just then.

Aware of his own agitation, and of the violent heat in his brain, he paused, and quelled it so thoroughly, that by the time the servant entered the face was not merely pale, but so unnaturally white, that the man fancied his master was ill, and forgot what had brought him.

“Are you ill, sir?”

“No!” was the stern reply. “George, why the devil do the police allow those vagabonds to squat all the day on the seat there, just in front of my window? Have them rooted out.”

So saying, he held out his hand to take the letter from the tray, and only thus did George know that his master was conscious there was a letter. When the servant had gone, and not till then, did Cunliff open the delicate pink envelope, and turn suddenly with his back to the light that he might better gaze on that which he had drawn forth, a card portrait.

“Only this?” his face seemed doubtfully to ask, and then its sudden illumination told all the rest. He understood it well enough. Presently he was in a cab, the horse galloping under the excitement of the cabman’s whip, who knew he had got the right kind of fare, when told to drive fast, and to go to “Coutts’s Bank.”

## CHAPTER III.

### A LONDON TWILIGHT.

LONDON is not beautiful, that must be owned ; neither is it grand or picturesque. It is not even convenient. The “ practical ” men to whom we are indebted for it have not yet carried out in architecture the rule they enforce so vigorously in their ordinary transactions ; they have not found out and discharged the incompetent—themselves.

But even this gigantic medley of buildings loses its hardness, ugliness, and incongruity when twilight hangs like a veil over the whole. Inexpressibly tender then steal forth a thousand objects, animate and inanimate, and we can gaze on and question them, as if suddenly set down in a new world.

That twilight lull is now existing in all its force and beauty for John Cunliff. The sky

above, from which the sun has quite vanished, seems yet full of his presence. Wanderers gaze on the fine opal tint with a sense of its pleasantness to the eye ; and as they gaze a star appears in it, the first and only one, sparkling, palpitating, wondrously beautiful. Below, at the same time, the artificial lights of the park begin to appear in bright succession among the trees, and Cunliff takes an almost personal interest in the movements of the unseen man who kindles them. The trees themselves, grouped in darkening masses, but forced forwards at intervals into publicity by the lamps, take new shapes ; suggest unfamiliar glades and coverts even to those who know them best ; and lend a kind of romantic background to the persons walking in the road, and to the carriages that roll dreamily along. The never-ceasing roar of the three millions of people who make up what we call London comes to Cunliff's ear as if some dim thought of the hour possessed, quite unconsciously, for a single instant—for a passing mood, the whole of that diverse mass of humanity.

Hark ! It is the clock of the palace tower

that strikes with its deep musical and prolonged boom. Before it ceases there comes faintly borne upon the wind, which changes for a moment its direction, the answering voice of the bell of St. Paul's. And then, short and menacing, from the farthest City bounds eastwards, comes, also borne upon the breeze, the sounds of the Tower cannon. And to the fancy, the three structures seem to take gigantic life, and to cover London with their far-stretching arms, — religion from Wren's magnificent dome brooding in the centre over all, and having the law and the sword, representatives of existing civilisation, on either hand, keeping watch and ward, within sight alike of the city and of the distant boundaries.

Amid his final preparations John Cunliff comes every now and then to the window to look out. His own thoughts are dream-like as the scene ; but with no twilight lull, no twilight peace for their atmosphere.

He hardly seems the same man that we have seen so much of during the last few hours. A sense of spiritual intoxication seems to expand his whole being ; though it

is so controlled by the Englishman's habitual reticence as to be perceptible only in the softened tone of the voice when he speaks to his servant; in the springy yet cautious step; and in the sparkle of the eye, which as it glances from time to time towards the brilliant star in the heavens, appears to borrow an unearthly lustre.

He answers now such letters as must be answered. He puts off engagements; declines invitations—and always on the same plea, his foreign tour. When they are completed, and he is about to send them to the post, he is struck by a sense of the ridiculousness of his position if aught should affect his purposed journey. What if he had made a mistake, after all? Nonsense! he knew better than that. There should be no mistakes. But he might as well retain the letters to the last. So he put them into his pocket, and in order to make occupation, finished the sorting of his desk papers, by selecting the few he cared to preserve and by burning the rest.

While thus engaged he came upon a single leaf of manuscript in his own handwriting,



and which yet seemed fresh—as if unseen for many years. As he gazed on it his thoughts were carried back to an altogether different and long-forgotten world of daily aims and occupations. He could hardly credit, for the moment, it was he who had written, when about eighteen or nineteen years old, the verses before him.

## STUDIES. No. I.

Black boughs at night, just arching o'er  
A little hall themselves have made ;  
Where spectral leaves upon the floor  
Dance through the light, dance through the shade ;  
While in the branch-built roof the Moon,  
Great world to little, holds the lamp.  
The soft light wakes the toad too soon ;  
He eyes askance the leafy tramp,  
Until his brightening eyeball sees  
The silvery slime-track of the snail ;  
Then squats ; to take him at his ease,  
And hold him linked by his own trail.  
He squats ; and heaves his glistening sides  
And sensual throat in stifled mirth.  
The adder sees, and rears, and glides :  
The red worm lengthens from the earth.

Cunliff paused a long time over this paper, looking at it, and not seeing it, but seeing instead the world beyond it, of his vigorous and

manly college life, of which these verses were a mere passing mood.

"It's well I had the sense not to go to No. 2," he said at last, as he carefully put by the leaf.

He would go out and freshen his blood, and shake off these morbid tendencies.

He went out. The first thing he saw through the increasing dusk was the family of vagrants on the seat, whom he had ordered to be driven off. He felt in a different mood now. Poor wretches, how desolate they all looked! Had they really no home? Would they sleep there? Were they very hungry? He wished they would ask him for help. He couldn't go to them, it looked so ostentatious—just as if he were on a philanthropic hunt.

While these thoughts ran through his mind he was able, unnoticed, to see something which touched him keenly. The family seemed to have been waiting for the return of a boy, who had been sent somewhere—perhaps to beg. The boy came. Cunliff saw, from the angry gesture of the father, and the pleading attitude of the mother, that the boy's honesty was suspected. The man

searched his pockets. Cunliff could not refuse the inviting shelter of a tree-trunk, which enabled him to get close to them, and see the end of the search. The little pockets were all turned out, and from the last of them emerged a hard, dirty crust of bread. The boy burst into tears as he gave up his hidden treasure. Cunliff's heart seemed to give him a sense of stifling, as he thought of the depth of misery the incident revealed.

He ought to stop and go a little into their history, before doing aught else, he knew that. But he was in no mood to embark in such mental adventures ; so he slipped the biggest coin he could feel in his pocket—a crown piece—into the man's hands, and said :—

“Take this, my friend, and get yourself and family something to eat. Good night !”

He heard no thanks, no loud “God bless you, sir !” follow him. He only heard the woman's passionate cry and the man's terrible silence.

He passed on and soon forgot the affair. He wandered about, neither knowing nor caring whither. He revelled in dreams that were only the more delicious that no human

being could guess at their existence, even though many might wonder what caused him to stroll to and fro so aimlessly.

Still he wandered—still he dreamed. He was at one moment so lost in thought, that when a cab came rushing past, at the turning of a corner, and the cabman seeing he had muddled the gentleman's overcoat, grew angry and abusive, Cunliff only laughed, and said to him,

“I assure you, I didn't intend to do it.”

He was to be roused from this amiable mood and these pleasant dreams. As he approached his home, thinking it must be dinner-time, he saw his man standing outside, bare-headed, looking anxiously in every direction but the right one.

“He wants me. There's something wrong.”

That was Cunliff's instant thought. An instinct warned him that all his glittering bubbles were about to burst. He walked fast, then faster, though still preserving that personal dignity of bearing which was a part of him—which he valued—and which he, a little too artificially perhaps, always maintained.

"There's a man in the hall, sir. He brought this letter, and said he was told to wait till he knew you had got it."

"Very well." He took the letter. "Keep the man five minutes. Then, if I do not ring, let him go. Give him a shilling."

Cunliff went slowly upstairs with his unopened letter; waited patiently while the servant lighted the lamp; saw the man close the door after himself as he went out, and then he read this :—

"Five o'clock.

"I have this moment received a letter from R., and copy for you a few sentences :—

"I have had a letter from a very aged maiden aunt, who tells me that some one, whose name she is not at liberty to mention, has told her that you and a Mr. Cunliff are very often together; constantly meeting at the same places; and that she believes you are to meet him at Lady Sellon's country-house; and, in a word, that she wishes me to hurry home and judge for myself. I shall hurry home undoubtedly, but for any reason rather than the one suggested in my aunt's

letter. She is an exceedingly old woman—nearly ninety—and I let her say what no one else, I think, would dare to say to me. But if you want, my dear Catherine, to know what I think, I say then go to Lady Sellon's by all means if you wish to go, whether Mr. Cunliff or Mr. anybody else is, or is not, to be also there. My trust, dearest, is in you; not in the place you happen to be at, or in the men into whose society you may happen to be thrown. I do trust you, darling, with all my heart and soul. Old as I am, I am young enough in heart to feel the tenderest affection for you. One that will never fail you while you do not wish it to fail. God bless and preserve you, my own ever dear, dear wife. Within three days I shall be with you.'

"Cunliff! Do you read this as I read it with streaming eyes, with a sense of shame that can never, never fade away, yet with a cry of transport to God that we are awakened in time?

"Farewell for ever and ever! You will not, I am sure, wish to violate this my only and parting injunction.

"I reopen this to say, do not blame yourself alone. God bless you! Again, farewell!"

When Cunliff had read to the last word, and he read very slowly, he raised with a painful gesture his long-bent head. Finding the light of the lamp too brilliant, he stretched forth his hand to moderate it, and whether intentionally or accidentally, put out the light.

## CHAPTER IV.

### EXHALATIONS OF THE DAWN.

At the age of twenty-two John Cunliff had quitted, as he had come to, the University under peculiar circumstances. He had entered it as a lonely, studious, friendless youth, not long after the death of a beloved mother ; and when he was dependent upon a harsh and unsympathetic father ; who kept him on the shortest possible allowance ; scarcely ever saw him or wrote to him, and seemed to think it not of the slightest importance whether his son studied or no. Thus he entered the University. When he quitted it he was surrounded by troops of friends, including some of the very best men of his college, who exulted in the honours he had won, and predicted what they were to lead to ; his father was dead, and had left behind him an estate



of two thousand a-year, without a sixpence of mortgage upon it ; and another relative having also died, young John Cunliff became the presumptive heir to a baronetcy, and a property of at least six times the value of his paternal estate.

That was his position when suddenly launched into the great world of society, with appetites keen as youth and health and the associations of a rich and cultivated nature could make them ; and where he found glad faces and seemingly warm hearts welcoming him on every side. Such a man, with good birth, manly and attractive person, eloquent tongue, a spiritual something not easy to describe in the general style of his conversation, and with a kind of stately chivalrousness in his peculiarly gentle demeanour to women, became the cynosure of female eyes ; and made the face of many a dowager grow almost ideal as she received the answer to her eager question, " Oh yes, it was quite true—two thousand a year, unencumbered, and with some prospect in the distance of nearly thirteen thousand a-year and a baronetcy !"

He entered London in the first flush of his

University successes. Yet it was remarkable how seldom he spoke of them—how unwilling he was to be spoken to on the subject. The Alps he had climbed only showed him the greater Alps yet to be surmounted. He was modest, earnest, hopeful; and in heart and soul the student and the scholar.

Thus, at least, he seemed to his few intimate associates at the time of his introduction to London society; perhaps even to himself. But there was another and still more remarkable trait of his character that must not be passed over. Though no one ever heard him speak in the language of Utopia, it was impossible to listen to him when engaged in any earnest discussion on political or social subjects, without seeing perpetually bright gleams of ideal light and Utopian fancy flashing across the arid regions of fact and figure; and suggesting that the young John Cunliff had gone far and wide in his wanderings after those central truths which promised to transform the world. Yes; he was then young enough and hopeful enough to believe in the divinity of his own instincts, which seemed ever to whisper to him, "Go

forth, thou, too, to the fight! Error, and vice, and crime, and misery are *not* the inevitable lot of man—they are only the inevitable lot of man's un-organised—half-barbaric past. It is habit, precedent for precedent's sake, and the slavishness of soul these two create—that sustain the existing evil of things. Destroy *them*—build on new foundations a place for the aspiring soul to labour—and then, indeed, shalt thou see this world become a temple fit for the gods, with men only less than gods inhabiting it.”

Perhaps it was the very magnitude of his secret desires, and the sense of unreality which exaggerated expectations and high-flown visions inevitably brings home to us, that sobered him in his communications with others, and suggested the propriety of due pause and preparation. The fashionable world soon settled all the rest. It did not treat his dreams with ridicule, for he took care it should know nothing about them. Silently, day by day, he measured its forces for resistance on the one hand, and its many seductive attractions, on the other, for those who are content simply to enjoy and ask no inconve-

nient questions, till he gave up the whole problem with a bitter laugh at his own absurdity ; and then—why, then, the world went on as usual in its own serene course, knowing nothing of its noble victory, or of the fresh victim offered at its shrine.

Thus speedily died out John Cunliff's notions of the possibility of his becoming a sort of literary prophet of a new social era, and with it went more than he or the world could have easily suspected.

What remained ? He would, at least, play the part of an English gentleman. Unbounded was Cunliff's faith in that character. Nor was he, perhaps, destitute of a strong hidden belief that he was himself, so far as natural powers and tendencies were concerned, no unfit representative of its truthfulness, high personal sense of honour, magnanimity, fortitude to bear, reticence in speech, dignity in serious act ; and all these springing from the belief in, and feeling for, the greatness of the English name, history, and destiny, as individualised in the said English gentleman ; with his nature deepened and heightened by the reflex of the religious sentiments that had

permeated, at critical periods, his family's historical life. A character that, at its best, needs only the flower or crown of all—chivalrous abnegation in the weightier things of life—to become the exemplar of the world; but which, at its worst, becomes one of the most insufferable specimens of humanity: egotistic, priggish, hard, cruel.

This dream shared, to a certain extent, the fate of the other. It may be very inconvenient, but certainly the scheme of Providence does not consist in giving us a complete nature with many separate parts which we may divide as we please—select, reject, or accept as we please—and so John Cunliff found; when, after a little coy dalliance, he threw himself with open hands and heart into the world's arms, as represented first by society at large, and then by some of its baser elements. In a word, society—which arrogates to itself the idea that it is the very flower of all civilisation—did not know how, or did not even care to try, to appeal to the purer and nobler elements in the young man's nature; which, if received in a natural and wholesome atmosphere, would have added new lustre to itself.

And as to what it did offer of material or sensual enjoyment, John Cunliff preferred to go elsewhere ; where he could, without any sort of social hypocrisy, please himself in his own way, and run riot to his soul's utmost content.

It was not long before John Cunliff's appearances at public and private receptions became less and less frequent ; and when he did come his presence ceased to create the old flutter, for the prophet had spoken—he was not inclined to marry.

Thus eight years passed away, each one of them leaving its own special mark upon him, till he became little better than an habitual sensualist, a bad landlord, an idle and utterly useless man ; and with little of the true gentleman remaining below the surface or shell.

Happily for him his pleasures were to a certain extent antagonistic. Poetic instincts of purity survived in him through all his worst degradations ; and made him feel at times as keenly the true character of his life, and shrink back from it with a loathing as intense as if some powerful religious belief had suddenly risen within him, and thrown his whole

nature into a kind of revolutionary convulsion. What religious feeling might have done for him Cunliff knew not, and never even dreamed of asking. What his poetic tastes left him he had little pleasure to see.

At thirty years of age he already felt as if his capacity for enjoyment (once so boundless) needed to be economised thenceforth. He therefore became thrifty in his pleasures; restricted in his range of vision; ceased to see always so many beautiful and attractive forms flitting before him, as parts of an infinitely extending ærial perspective, and fixed on one of them. To do him justice, John Cunliff's love for Mrs. Rhys was certainly the best feature in a continuously bad life, if we may speak so paradoxically. It was only since he knew her that he had given the first real check to desires and tastes perpetually wandering, under obedience to no law but that of an unceasing thirst for pleasure.

## CHAPTER V.

### PASSING GLIMPSES.

DURING the day following that on which our story begins, a gentleman got out at Shrewsbury from the train going towards London, and immediately took his place in the down train for Wales, thus retracing the way he had come.

The official, as he looked at the ticket given up to him, wondered why the gentleman was sacrificing so coolly, over a ride of a few miles from his country seat, a ticket taken for London. He appeared to be well known on the platform. Porters touched their caps as he passed. The guard of the Welsh train put him into a compartment by himself, and locked the door.

The traveller shut down both windows, and threw himself into a corner with the air of a man worn out with fatigue and anxiety, and



who felt he could now enjoy his miseries in his own savage fashion. He threw his feet with their muddy boots on the opposite seat; opened the breast of his coat, and drew a long, deep breath; flung his hat to the farthest corner; and then sat still for a minute or two, staring at the flying trees.

“What a superstitious ass I grow! I put it all on the question whether I should or should not reach Shrewsbury in time for this train. I did reach; and here I am, going, not to London, but—whither? To the devil, most likely. With all my heart. And I had better, now that I am in for it, entitle myself to his most respectful consideration.”

Thus ran the first turbid current of thought: the actual evil of the speaker's heart consciously exaggerated in his bitter irony.

By-and-bye he became quieter, leaned back his head, closed his eyes, and for a few minutes seemed to sleep; but suddenly he started up, and stared as if he saw some horrible thing; then laughed, struck out his arms with a sort of gymnastic movement, till he was thoroughly wakened from his drowsiness, when he sat down again, as still, and

holding as stern a command over himself as if not a single seat in the carriage had been vacant.

He was soon interrupted by the guard, who said, in a low, deferential tone—

“Very sorry, sir, but we’ve no room elsewhere. Quite a gentleman, and——”

“Now then !” shouted the station-master ; the guard sounded his whistle ; the ponderous train began slowly to move ; and then, leaping in so as to compel the gentleman inside to draw up his limbs in an undignified hurry and posture, came the new passenger. The door was banged to. They were off.

“I really beg pardon,” began the newcomer, out of breath. “Rather a sudden entrance. We had a run for it. I didn’t know anybody was inside. I——”

Here he stopped abruptly, noticing that no kind of response was forthcoming ; stopped ; took one steady look at the corner where the silent person sat, and said aloud, with inimitable coolness and enjoyment—

“Really ! I am sure I thought I saw a gentleman somewhere !”

And then, as if entirely convinced of his

mistake, took out a cigar ; lighted it without gesture or apology, which obviously on his theory could not be required ; opened the window on his own side, and was about to do the same on the other, when the silent gentleman found it necessary to interfere with a decided lift of the hand, and a—

“No ; I thank you !”

Again the new-comer looked, and his look was answered with interest. And then, before either knew what he was going to say, both broke out into a laugh.

Five minutes later the two young men were engaged in more genial talk than either of them had ever had before on so slight an acquaintance.

The silent traveller had felt attracted by the intruder's face even in spite of his boorish reception of him. Subsequent glances more than confirmed the impression. He thought he had never before seen so handsome a countenance to be so devoid of pretension and conceit. There was nothing scholarly about it, nothing intellectually noble ; just as there was nothing sensual, nothing mean. It was manly. It was picturesque, with its short,

thick, curling, chestnut-coloured hair. But its great charm was an indescribable healthiness and happiness of expression, a perfect sunniness of content, that obviously did not spring from any temporary cause,—recent good-fortune, or recent gratification of long-cherished desires,—but seemed to be native. The very sound of his laugh—low, joyous, but quite undemonstrative—would, of itself, if you shut your eyes, tell you the kind of man,—a man who needed only to be. In person he was of middle height; shorter and stouter than his fellow-traveller; easy, graceful, and unembarrassed in manner, though not to the critical eye of his neighbour, polished. That personage set him down as a gentleman farmer, and so he proved to be. He was from Kent, which he soon gave his companion to understand was the finest county in England.

“Yet you do find a change desirable sometimes?” was remarked to him.

“Change, sir?”

The young farmer laughed; glanced at the scenery they were passing, shrugged his shoulders, and looked at his companion with

eyes brimful of merriment at the idea of his needing a change.

"I had something to do to make up my mind to come away, I can tell you!" he said. "I haven't been away before at this time of the year since I was a boy."

He had a peculiar mode of speaking, in brief, quickly-uttered sentences, with a meditative pause between each, and the words that came after the pause were often rather a continuation of his silent thoughts than of what he had previously said.

"Why it's just in its glory! No rains over there yet. Roads cracking in the sun. Hop-pickers pouring in night and day. Ditches nice and dry for 'em. Corn-fields up to the hedge-tops. Nights pretty well light all through; and so hot with gipsy fires, and so noisy with corn crakes, and crickets, and with apples falling crash, crash, on the cabbage-leaves, you can hardly sleep. No, sir, I haven't come out of Kent, in September, for the sake of a change."

"Nor for health, I presume?"

"Not exactly."

"Business, perhaps?" suggested the other,

tempted on by the farmer's own interest in, and liking for, the conversation.

"Yes ; and not very pleasant business."

"Indeed !"

"I have a cousin in Wales—a small farmer with forty acres of thin mountain land—only rents it—been as poor as a rat all his life. Six months ago he came into a legacy of nigh seven thousand pounds, and now I've got to tell him it's all moonshine."

"How's that ?"

"Do you happen to know the firm of Morgan and Garnet, curriers, Bermondsey ?"

"No," said the other, with a slight smile.

"Well, Morgan, a Welshman, who made that business, retired twenty years ago from the management, but kept his capital, twenty-seven thousand pounds, in the concern. He died last April, and we, who were his nearest relatives—there's four of us in all—thought we had come in for a good thing. I bought a hunter—a prime bit of blood—on the strength of it. Luckily, I'm not obliged to sell him. Two days ago, when I was expecting a summons as executor to meet the partner, and receive the transfer of the capital

eyes brimful of merriment at the idea of needing a change.

"I had something to do to make my mind to come away, I can tell you!" "I haven't been away before at this time of the year since I was a boy."

He had a peculiar mode of speaking, in brief, quickly-uttered sentences, with a tentative pause between each, and the words that came after the pause were often a continuation of his silent thoughts of what he had previously said.

"Why it's just in its glory! No rain there yet. Roads cracking in the sun. The pickers pouring in night and day. It's nice and dry for 'em. Corn-fields up to the hedge-tops. Nights pretty well lighted through; and so hot with gipsy fires, and so noisy with corn crakes, and crickets, and apples falling crash, crash, on the cabbage leaves, you can hardly sleep. No, I haven't come out of Kent, in September, for the sake of a change."

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so long invested, I got, instead, a letter inviting me to a meeting of creditors. Didn't my lawyer go off in a terrible hurry! 'Twas all true. Two-and-sixpence in the pound for the ordinary creditors—nothing to the dead man's relations, for he had been a partner, and his capital long since lost—which he didn't know or suspect."

"Sharp practice—eh? to keep you all in ignorance so long."

"That's what I can't get over. For myself I don't care; but I never felt so cut up for anybody as I do for my cousin, Elias Morgan. He's rough, but true as steel. One in a thousand, sir."

"But as he has never, it seems, been other than poor, won't he soon get over it?"

"He may. It's a cruel business. Just one bit of sunshine in his whole hard life to show him how gloomy it had been, and then everything back in the old state."

The listener's look was sympathetic, but he said nothing, and the young farmer went on:—

"I'm afraid I made matters worse by being over sanguine. When the rascals—who

wanted, they tell me, to inveigle another partner—kept up such a show of prosperity as to pay us a year's profit, eight hundred pounds—two hundred a-piece — which had been for some time due, and when my lawyer said it was a most respectable firm, is it very wonderful I was taken in? So when I sent Elias his two hundred, I congratulated him on his being easy for life, and told him I should soon have to send him all the rest, nearly seven thousand pounds."

"Then he may be incurring liabilities on the strength of it."

"That's what I'm afraid of. He was so cautious as to write me back a special letter of inquiry. It ought to have warned me. It didn't. I told him the money was as safe as in the bank."

"Hem! Very awkward that! He may be drawing cheques on this ideal bank in the shape of orders for goods, that are really promises to pay."

"Well, it's done, and can't be undone. If he's very hard upon me, I must grin and bear it, as one of my ploughmen says when

he is pulled up suddenly by a big root or stone in the furrow."

"Then you are equally disappointed?"

"Oh, it won't hurt me."

"Are you so very rich?" was the query in the other's eye.

"It won't hurt me," he repeated. "In fact, I've got a hunter out of it. I shouldn't have had him else. Now I mean to keep him. Mine's only a bit of a place; but it was my father's, and my grandfather's, and, I believe, my great grandfather's, but I won't speak to that. A hundred and nine acres. That's all. But such land that I'd rather have an acre of it than ten of this foul stuff we're passing."

The companion looked out with a curious expression of interest at the land they were "passing," but said nothing, perhaps through the stoppage of the train.

"We're in for more company," said the farmer. "Shouldn't you set this down for a doctor?"

A gentleman with splashed leggings came and took his place in the seat nearest the platform, and turned round instantly to speak

to some one who had accompanied him. His first words made the farmer smile significantly :—

“You’ll keep her quiet, my man, and be careful about the medicine.”

“Ay,” answered a gruff voice, while eight thick dirty fingers hooked themselves over the door. The platform was too low for the face of their owner to be seen by those farther in the carriage. Only the top of a grizzled rough head was visible to them ; and sometimes a bit of red forehead full of wrinkles ; and a pair of eyes bleared and bloodshot, and wildly intent on every word that fell from the doctor’s mouth.

“Keep the children away as much as you can, you know.”

“Ay ! And the light stuff in the queer-shaped bottle to-night, ain’t it ? and the dark in the morning ?”

The doctor nodded.

There seemed to be no more to say ; but the fingers still clung obstinately to the door ; and the bleared eyes still looked up into the doctor’s face. There was apparently something more he wished to ask, and which the

doctor did not wish to hear. He looked up and down the platform. The man's eyes followed the direction of his, and the grizzled head turned listening intently to the puffing of the engine.

Suddenly a broad pair of shoulders filled up the window. The man had set his foot on the step, his arms over the door, and brought his face close to the doctor's. A repulsive-looking face, with a square chin covered by a prickly beard of a week's growth. He said something which the others could not hear, but they saw the doctor look boldly at the face, and heard him say—

“Well, and if it should be so? We are doing our best. If after all it should be so, you are a man, arn't you, and a father? You know, you musn't forget that.”

The arms uncrossed with a heavy, awkward haste. The fingers hooked themselves on the door again. The grim face and the unfra-grant breath were gone. Then the fingers also disappeared, and the window was cleared.

The doctor unthinkingly put out his head to look after him, but drew it in quickly, and

kicked his carpet-bag farther under the seat.

In a minute the fingers were again on the door, and the face came close up.

“ Doctor ! ”

“ Well, my man ? ”

“ Jarman said as he was a comin’ over to-morrow, agin, for the rent. If she ’s better, by the Lord ! I’ll see him, and speak him civil. I will, Doctor ; but if it’s *that*— ”

The thick voice died off into hard breathings. The eyes looked round the carriage at the two quiet occupants on the further seats, encountering their eyes without seeming to see them.

“ If *it’s that*, Doctor,” continued the thick voice, “ keep him off o’ my place, will you ? Keep him wide of it, Doctor ! He was there o’ Thursday, and that set her off. She was by herself, and he went on at her ever so long, and when he was gone, she skirled out with a silly laugh, and’s been so ever since.”

“ Be off, my man ! The train’s moving,” said the Doctor.

“ Jarman said as the landlord’s kep’ writin’

for the money. If he writes agin, tell Jarman—will you, Doctor?—to write back and say his d—d rotten pig-styes can't, and never won't be paid for in flesh and blood and money too. When we can live in 'em, instead o' dying in 'em, p'raps we can pay for 'em; but we can't pay house rent and coffin rent, too, all the year round! What do they mean by a saying we don't pay? By the Lord! we pay that as they'll be made to give us the receipts on, some day. Yes, yes! good-bye, Doctor. God bless yer!"

The Doctor turned to look at his fellow-travellers. One was gazing out of the window; the other, with a face full of sympathy, seemed to ask the same question that the miserable husband had been determined to have answered.

But the Doctor, though reticent as to his opinion of the woman's chance, could not help showing something of that which was in his thoughts. He explained to the young farmer that he had been called in to a bad case of typhus; and that it was a chance if he saved the poor woman's life, who had seven miserable children dependent on her, and

on that poor desperate creature, her husband.

"Nice thing, isn't it?" he asked, "for a gentleman to keep cottages on his estate that breed pestilence and death; and then himself, spend every shilling he can wring out of his tenants in all the enjoyments of society?"

"And is this his land we are passing?" demanded the young farmer, with quite new interest in the state of the soil.

"It is."

"What's his name?"

Before it was possible for the surgeon to reply, the gentleman in the corner turned from the window full face upon the surgeon, who then first saw him, slightly coloured, hemmed, and took advantage of the slackening of the train to cry out, with his head at the window—

"Here—porter?"

"What may be the gentleman's name?" again asked the unsuspecting querist.

"Cunliff!" was the stern reply from the far corner—the occupant of which again exchanged glances with the embarrassed, but



not exactly ashamed surgeon, who, lifting his hat, said—

“I wish you good-morning, sir!”

“Good-morning!” said the gentleman, as he responded to the courtesy with a menacing expression of face.

The young farmer followed with his eye the retreating form of the surgeon along the platform, then turned to ask more about this Mr. Cunliff and his land; but his new acquaintance was settling himself for a nap, and saying with a half-smile, as he shut his eyes—

“Excuse me; I scarcely slept last night.”

And thus suddenly broke up the pleasant relations that had been growing between the two young men. This was much to the regret of the Kentish farmer, whose freshness of feeling, contrasted with his very limited intellectual experience, had caused him to look on his companion as a marvel of knowledge and eloquence; and to listen with so much earnestness, faith, and admiration visible in his large, bright, joyous eyes, as to give new zest to the operations of the speaker’s

own mind ; and apparently, he had felt in return a counter influence working on himself. However, it now seemed all to go for nothing. Hardly a word more was said till the train stopped at Llansaintfraid ; and there, when they both found themselves standing on the platform, about to separate most likely for ever, with the rain making so great a noise on the glass overhead that they could scarcely hear each other speak, it seemed a question for the moment whether they wouldn't even part as absolute strangers. But the young farmer, even though a little hurt, could not help putting out his hand ; and it was grasped warmly just for a moment ; then something was muttered about hoping to have the pleasure of meeting again somewhere or other, and the two separated—the one to go, as he said, to “ the Town,” the other to take the “ Major's coach ” just about to start for Dolgarrog. They separated, not even knowing each other's name.

The young farmer paused on the platform just for a moment, looking after his late companion ; and seeing he was mistaking his way, ran after him, and shouted—

"To the left!"

"Thanks!" was shouted back, and then they were rapidly lost to each other in the distance.

## CHAPTER VI.

### OVER CRIBA BAN.

To the farmer's surprise and vexation the coach was full. While he had been thinking of his late acquaintance, and obeying the impulse to set him right on his road, other passengers had hurried to secure the seats, and the train being a heavy one, the Dolgarrog portion of it soon filled the coach. There was a general outcry among the Welsh passengers to have him up or in somehow; but the driver, a gentleman who owned the coach, said it was quite impossible; they were over-loaded already.

The disappointed man looked black, and growled aloud—

“Pleasant voyage!” and hurried back out of the rain to the platform, from whence he went off to the town, which is at some dis-

tance, fearing he would be obliged to stay over Sunday, when the coach did not run. Before entering the inn yard he was overtaken by a man who had been hanging about the station till the coach was out of the way, and then hearing of the gentleman left behind, had run after him. He had come from Dolgarrog with a party of tourists, and was going back when the horses had rested.

"How much?"

"Five shillings, sir."

"All right. Quick as you can."

About half-an-hour later, and while the farmer, whose spirits had sunk a little, was trying to congratulate himself as he sat before a fine cold sirloin of beef, and a preposterously tall glass of ale, on his good fortune—"so economical, too!"—the driver re-entered.

"Wild night, sir, to cross the mountains. No idea of stopping here, I suppose?"

"Certainly not. Are you ready?"

"Would you mind, sir, a gentleman going with you?"

"Oh, I see. As I'm not to be got rid of, I must have a companion. And he pays five shillings too, eh?"

The driver laughed.

“Who is he?”

The driver handed a card, on which there was writing in pencil. It was a neat, almost elegant hand, though that perhaps was in a measure due to the care and minuteness compelled by the limited space.

“Mr. John Rymer begs to apologise for the liberty he is taking, and trusts the occasion will be his sufficient excuse. He is most anxious to reach Dolgarrog to-night; but there are no horses obtainable either at the other inn or at this. A share in the return carriage, which has been pre-engaged by the gentleman he has the honour to address, is therefore his only resource. May he then venture to ask so great a favour?”

“Give my compliments—Mr. Robert Chamberlayne’s compliments to Mr. Rymer—and say I shall be glad of his company. Perhaps he will like to come in here. I shall soon be ready.” Then, as the driver moved off, he called after him: “I say, no more passengers! It’ll be ‘No’ next time, even if, as I expect, you bring me a benighted woman and child!”

The driver only laughed his answer, and went out.

A minute later the gentleman came in. How shall we paint the expression of the two faces? The annoyance—almost shame—on Mr. Rymer's, to be so unexpectedly caught and exposed in his secretive arrangements; the genial, broadening mirth on the other's, who had risen to receive his visitor, and could not help exclaiming—

“Hang me, if I didn't think so!”

Mr. Rymer, with admirable self-possession, began to explain. And then Mr. Chamberlayne could no longer restrain himself within the bounds of courtesy and good breeding. He laid down knife and fork, and roared again.

Mr. Rymer joined in the laugh, or tried to do so; then he said—

“But I thought you were gone by the coach?”

“It was full; they wouldn't have me.”

“I see. How absurd! How very ridiculous! But I asked the man if it was a gentleman in a dark overcoat, and he said, No.”

“I wore two—they're very thin—and I

was getting so hot with my walk that I took one off before the man came up to me. So you also are going to Dolgarrog? How very odd!"

"Very! And how fortunate we should thus meet again!"

"Yes; but why the deuce didn't you think so before?" was the question in Chamberlayne's expressive eyes. Rymer didn't choose to notice them. They got into the coach and were driven off.

"I assure you," said Mr. Rymer, after a pause, "I am really glad of this meeting again—quite apart from its convenience to me."

Chamberlayne needed some such assurance to recover his former interest. He smiled. And then Mr. Rymer, as if conscious of his false position, evidently determined to have it soon forgotten, by regaining his ascendancy over the mind of his companion. So he promptly forced the conversation into particular and agreeable channels, and again delighted the young farmer.

But he was not quite successful in making Mr. Robert Chamberlayne forget. He saw



that that gentleman was getting more sensitive, reticent, and cautious. No wonder. How could Chamberlayne overlook the fact that Mr. Rymer, even if he had not liked to go by the coach to Dolgarrog, might have said he was going there, and might have offered a share in the carriage he had been intending to take? What did it mean? That he had been standing on his social rank? Confound his social rank!—Chamberlayne was inclined to cry, if his social rank was mean enough to encourage other men to talk of their affairs, and then when they exhibited in return equal interest in his, to coolly make them a bow and walk off.

So mused Chamberlayne, in spite of Rymer's pleasant talk. But, somehow, the latter gained upon him nevertheless. He liked him, gentleman or no gentleman. Perhaps he had mistaken altogether the cause of his reticence. Perhaps he had mistaken even his social position.

A bright idea strikes him. Isn't he a speculator in the gold mines, of which so much has lately been said? Of course he was! Why they were both now on the

direct road to them. Bod Elian itself, Elias Morgan's place, had four or five gold mines within its immediate neighbourhood. That hypothesis needed only to be true to explain all. Was it true?

"I suppose," he said to Rymer in the most artfully quiet way he knew how to assume, "you have heard of the new mines?"

"Ah, yes. The British El Dorado. Anything in them?" The words were indifferent enough—but there was quite a promising ring in the voice, Chamberlayne thought.

"I fancy so," was his answer. And there he stopped, and turned away a little to show his indifference. And both were silent.

"Which is said to be the best of these mines?" asked Rymer after a little pause.

"The Duke of Cornwall's, I think."

"You don't happen to know—do you? the present value of the shares, the amount of paid-up capital, and the likelihood of success?"

"No," said Chamberlayne, "but it would be easy to learn."

"Ay, but so that one might trust to the alleged facts—if one were inclined to speculate?"

"I think so."

There the subject dropped, but Chamberlayne could not help saying slyly to himself, "Aha! I thought I'd find him out! He doesn't want to buy a pig in a poke, nor pay too much when he does buy. 'Cute fellow! I may help him if he's on that scent." Then he said aloud, "What are your plans on reaching Dolgarrog?"

"Plans? I haven't got any that I know of."

"I am going to a private house, Butty Hughes's! I'd rather be there than in the tourists' hotels, which must be still very crowded—though the season's nearly over."

"I don't know but I am in the same mind. Who is Butty Hughes? What a name!"

"You mustn't call him so—he's a most respectable old gentleman. When I was pupil to the Reverend Daniel Lloyd, whom I hope to see to-morrow, I used to sit in the parlour at Mr. Hughes's, and eat bread and butter every time I came into Dolgarrog. His invitation (always the same)—'Have a bit of bread and butty?' was a standing joke. I and the little Lloyds called him among our-

selves Butty Hughes. But he's a very respectable old gentleman. Shall we see if he can accommodate us?"

"With all my heart," responded Rymer.

"The rooms are ridiculously small, but clean and comfortable," added Chamberlayne.

From that moment Mr. Rymer, as if he had, on second thoughts, discovered special advantages in an intimacy he had previously striven and manœuvred to shun, threw off whatever, even of occasional reticence, his manner had previously exhibited. He seemed now to accept Chamberlayne's first advances in a thoroughly genial spirit. In a word, there was, thenceforward, a perfect tone of equality.

They were still ascending, as they had been doing almost from the first mile or so of the journey. The sharp mountain air penetrated to every corner of the rickety carriage. Chamberlayne, as he grew more comfortable about his companion, fell asleep. A heavy drowsiness had also for some time been stealing over Rymer. But the cold would not let him give way to it, so he remained in a state of miserable half-consciousness—personal and mental

—patiently pushing back Chamberlayne's heavy form, as it kept falling against him ; patiently listening to the rattling of the broken windows ; to the bleating of a sheep lost somewhere in the black watery chaos without ; and to the sudden fall of masses of slate, that seemed to him as if the very foundations of the hills were shaking and shivering away into fragments.

As he leant back, to escape the drifting rain, with half-closed eyes, he saw lights twinkling, now down in giddy depths, now up on what had before appeared to be dark rolling clouds.

The noise of waters was everywhere, trickling, babbling, leaping, roaring. There seemed to be a kind of water jubilee that night, in which river shouted to river, sea to sea, the waters under the earth to the waters above the earth ; and yet they were now on the highest ridge of a shoulder of the Criba Ban ; and Rymer would have seen, if there had been light, a wondrous panorama of mountain tops, with mountain valleys squeezed in between them—or looking so.

Once they stopped in front of an inn. Ry-

mer, at the sight of the red firelight streaming from the door, felt inclined to get out, and stretch his limbs, and warm himself; but Chamberlayne was so sound asleep, and the interior of the house looked so strange and uninviting, he fancied, that he preferred to remain where he was; so while a boy came out to give the horse water, and the driver went in, John Rymer took his first look at a Welsh interior.

A flight of rough stone stairs faced the door, and on these stairs an army of black shadows coming from above, and an army of lurid fire gleams, from the room on the side, met and struggled for possession. Now the red light ascended in triumph, pushing off the darkness, and showing more and more of the stained damp stones. Revealing two tiny children, tired and dirty, eating their oatcake supper, side by side, on the stairs; revealing, first, their little wooden brass-toed shoes; then the dirty, dimpled knees; their arms; the lovely little faces leaning cheek to cheek; the great round oat-cake, with two mouths closing on its thin edge at the same moment; the tumbled, glittering curls. Then back

would fall the red light, and down would come the darkness, swallowing stair after stair, till bright curls, baby faces, fat knees, wooden shoes, all were gone from sight, and there was only a worn step or two left visible, and the room to the right, where three solemn men, watched by a solemn, long-nosed shepherd dog were drinking, and talking in a strange tongue. A young woman was nursing a child in one corner ; while a stiff old dame with short petticoats, and with her knitting in her hands, came stalking out to look at the strangers, to whom she vouchsafed a bobbing curtesy.

The young woman began to sing to her child a soft little Welsh air, to which the old dame's flapping cap-frill kept solemn time. Two voices, small, fresh, and clear, from the dark stairs, joined in the song.

"What's that?" cried Chamberlayne, waking and staring about with his wide blue eyes.

By this time the driver had resumed his seat. The firelight gave Rymer one more glimpse of the stairs, and of the tiny mouths opened to the shape of a round O, and two

clumsy wooden shoes raised to beat time to the tune they sang, and then began again the rattling of windows.

“N’s da’!” (Nos da’—good night), said the old dame.

“N’s da’!” answered the driver, and on they went down into the windy, watery darkness.

Down, still down, mile after mile, between dark woods, which in the light of day are so inexpressibly beautiful, with their fern-covered ground, surface teeming with wild flowers, and low guardian wall, where the moss, most delicious of natural cushions, may be felt several inches deep on the rounded stones of the top.

Down, still down, through the pelting rain, till the lights in the sombre and low stone houses on each side tell the travellers they are in Dolgarrog. And there, to the driver’s great relief,—who had been ordered by Rymer, when starting, to drive to his own hotel,—he was directed by Chamberlayne, to take them to Mr. Hughes’s, at the Council House.

This was a long, low building, at the very bottom of the market place. Rymer could



see nothing striking about it in the darkness and rain, and was glad to follow Chamberlayne into the shop. A single flaring jet of gas lighted it and its contents, which formed the oddest mixture Rymer had ever seen. The shop was paved with bright red bricks, which a stout young woman with her hair over her eyes was mopping vigorously. Tarpaulin hats, untanned leggings, tin kettles, onions, and dried hams, hung from the low ceiling. On the deal counter smoked a batch of bread, hot from the oven ; and behind the counter, sorting the loaves, stood a woman of about forty, with a worn, amiable face, and soft dark eyes, which continually glanced to the far end of the shop, where, in a little parlour, and seated by a roaring fire, the master of the Council House was taking his supper. He was a fine-looking old gentleman, fair-faced, and with blue eyes, full of gentle, childish enjoyment of his food and of everything that was going on. There was a softness and oiliness about him that made Rymer smile as he thought of the name that Chamberlayne had given him.

There was a great fuss over Chamberlayne

when, after teasing the good folks for some time to discover who he was, he made them remember Mr. Lloyd's young gentleman, who used to come there for bread and butter.

The little room upstairs was vacant and quite ready for their use, for the hotels which sent their overflowings to the Council House were not just then full. The gentlemen were both glad to retire early.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DOLGARROG.

DOLGARROG by the light of morning confirmed all that Dolgarrog by night had suggested of melancholy greyness, barren breadth, and straggling architecture.

To Mr. Rymer, as he looked down from the window of the old Council House, while Chamberlayne piled the fire to keep out the damp, the town appeared inexpressively dreary. The low stone houses seemed utterly deficient of window-sill and balcony, doorstep and portico, and of all those innumerable little hints and promises of interior comfort which ooze out of English homes. In the intricacies of back streets, perhaps some little flannel-weaver might have his flower-pot or his blackbird at the window of his one-roomed factory, but no hint of such luxury found its

way, in odour or in song, to the grey market-place.

Unadorned, stiff-backed, austere, yet not without a certain pathetic suggestiveness, and built of the same sad-coloured stone that covered the graves in the churchyard, the houses seemed to belong to a solemn Puritanic community, who regarded their town and their churchyard as two chambers of one dwelling ; two chambers, in one of which they spent their day, the other their night.

The rain fell, as Rymer stood looking out, seeing no signs of life in the King's-square, as the market-place was called, except now and then a half-dressed slipshod woman, running across to fill her jug or kettle from the swollen little spring. There was a large covered way over the opposite shops, where, last night, gas was flaring, and legs of mutton, and linseys, and wooden shoes were cavilled over ; but now, on the rainy Sunday morning, all was silent and deserted, only a miserable outcast of a dog had gone under for shelter, and was looking up and sniffing at the empty meat-hooks.

When breakfast was over, Mr. Chamber-

layne sent word to his landlord, that if he had no objection his friend and himself would come down and hear the Dolgarrog news ; and Mr. Butty responding most heartily from the little parlour at the foot of the stairs, the two gentlemen presently joined him there.

A delicious little parlour ! They saw it down there below glowing and glistening at the stair-foot,—a queer little three-cornered bit of a room—as they descended by the steep stairs which led right into it, and saw doors in different parts opening out. A room where Brobdignagdian roses blossomed on Lilliputian walls ; where the tiniest of windows were darkened by the highest of cacti ; where the heavy furniture would only fit in one particular way ; where the woolly, yielding hearth rug reached further than the middle of the room, making it seem all fireside ; where there was not a square inch of oak-panelling, or a twisted chair leg but was in a state of warm, blushing polish ; for the parlour was, in fact, the object of everybody's best and brightest handiwork, the very idol of the old house.

They found the master, who was as little in proportion with it as everything else, seated

in an elbow chair by the fire, with his wife's apron pinned over his shoulders, and his Sunday toilet being performed by Mrs. Hughes in bits and scraps between her more pressing household duties ; Butty having long since been too stout to undertake so arduous a task himself.

He rose and blushinglly apologised to the gentlemen for the state in which they found him ; while his wife set them chairs, and placed two steaming tumblers beside that one from which Mr. Butty occasionally sipped to sustain himself during the fatigues of his toilet.

Mr. Rymer stood at the window a minute, looking at the people crossing the King's-square on their way to the church, and to the many little chapels.

" Well," said Mr. Butty, reseating himself, and resigning his silver locks to his wife's hands again. " I suppose you young gentlemen are going up to Capel Illtyd Church this morning, to hear your old master — eh, Mr. Robert ? Mrs. Rhys has come home, you know, and there will be English service."

" Yes, indeed, Mr. Robert," added Mrs.

Hughes ; and those words, always so sweet and characteristic from a Welshwoman's lips, lost none of their force now. " Yes, indeed, Mr. Robert, you must go. And eh, dear me ! —why he'll never know you a bit."

" I was thinking of going," answered Chamberlayne ; " but I didn't know whether Mr. Rymer would care to walk a couple of miles in this weather, though it is clearing a little."

He looked inquiringly at Mr. Rymer, who stood at the window, with his back to them. He had happened to be looking at his watch when he heard the lady's name mentioned, and the question put to him. He looked at it still, as he paused before answering, and by its aid gave himself exactly half-a-minute for thought. Chamberlayne wondered if he had heard the question.

Five more seconds. Mr. Rymer almost felt that if they had been no longer than ordinary seconds, he never should have seen the inside of Capel Iltyd Church ; but they were long seconds, full of evil leisure, as if some imp of wickedness had leapt astride the little gold hand, and was holding it back, and jeering,

and gaping at the pale face bending over it in an agony of hesitation.

"What do you say?" asked Chamberlayne.  
"Shall we go?"

"Decidedly," answered Rymer, turning round in his quick way. "I shall like it, of all things. Do we start at once?"

"Not for a quarter-of-an-hour or so," returned Chamberlayne. And then, taking his boyish low seat in the corner, he began his inquiries about old acquaintances; which Mr. Butty answered with a pleasant twinkle in his eye, at seeing he remembered so many of the tribes of Jones and Evans, Williams, Roberts, Rees, and Hughes, that almost exclusively peopled Dolgarrog.

The twinkle became mischievous presently, and both Butty and his wife sent amused expectant glances at Chamberlayne, as if waiting for a name that the young gentleman felt some reluctance to mention. At last Mrs. Hughes, while giving her husband's hair a little pull, said—

"Eh, dear, Mr. Robert, sir, the master's waiting to hear you ask after your little *cariad* (sweetheart), Miss Hirell."



Chamberlayne coloured slightly and laughed.

"I didn't ask, because I am going to Bod Elian myself to-day, Mrs. Hughes. They're all well, I hope?"

"Yes, sure," answered Butty Hughes, his fat face dimpling with smiles as he exchanged significant glances with his wife. "And your uncle, Elias, is a great man at Dolgarrog to-day, Mr. Robert."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"Why, don't you see the country-people coming in?" asked Mrs. Hughes. "There's all Capel Illtyd chapel-people, and the folk from up in the mountains behind, that'll be here. The master's counted twenty from Aber. Eh! there'll be a chapel full!"

Chamberlayne stood up and looked out of the window in astonishment.

"Why, what has all this to do with Elias Morgan?" he asked, and Butty's tongue was now unloosed.

Didn't Mr. Robert know? There was the great Calvinistic Methodist minister from the Welsh chapel in London had come down, and was going to preach at Dolgarrog, that morning, in aid of a new

chapel that Elias was building near his own home.

“Elias building a chapel !” echoed Chamberlayne, in undisguised alarm.

“Yes, indeed !” exclaimed husband and wife in chorus, though it was Mrs. Hughes who went on—“And’s put a hundred pounds to it, and is responsible for all it will cost. Two hundred and fifty pounds, they say ! Yes, indeed !”

Chamberlayne stared at the couple in blank dismay. A gentle glow of excitement overspread the face of his host, who, to heighten the effect his news had produced, went on to give more illustrations of Elias Morgan’s expenditure.

While Mrs. Hughes unpinned her apron, and took it from his shoulders, and dusted him with it, he told Chamberlayne how Elias was sending his young brother away to college to-morrow, with an outfit which David Jones, the little tailor, had been at work upon for the last three weeks ; how Hirell, Elias’s daughter, was to be sent to a sort of finishing school at Liverpool ; and how she and Keziah were working their fingers to the bone to get

her dresses made ; how Elias growled and groaned over the fine silks and ribbons as vanity and vexation of spirit, but how, notwithstanding his preaching, he had been very kind and generous to the young people, as if he had not the heart to spoil the first glow of good fortune for them. Butty told how a great sum had been laid out on Bod Elian itself—Elias having built two new rooms to the house, and bought a red waggon and a second horse.

All this Butty told with a cheery, childlike excitement, sometimes losing himself in the middle of a sentence, and being obliged to look for help to his wife, who was a little, a very little better acquainted with the English language than himself. Now and then they had a little gentle, coquettish discussion over certain points, and would stop to have it out in Welsh ; and between-whiles Mrs. Hughes would call up the stairs to her two nieces, who were dressing for chapel, to hasten, and who presently came down with their hymn-books in their hands. A shrill dialogue in Welsh was carried on between them and Mrs. Hughes as she buttoned her husband's gloves, and put

the finishing touches to his collar. In the midst of it Mr. Rymer, who had been for the last few minutes feeling a good deal of sympathy for Chamberlayne, said to him in a low voice—

“You ought almost to see your relatives before they go into chapel.”

Chamberlayne started to hear this unexpected confirmation of his own thoughts.

“Yes,” he muttered. “I must if I can.”

“Then I shall have to find my way to Capel Illtyd Church alone,” said Rymer, as he prepared to move.

“I hope not. Wait a bit for me,” replied Chamberlayne.

“Good morning, gentlemen!” said Butty, turning back to bow politely, as he joined the girls at the door; and kissing the tips of his black kid gloves to Mrs. Hughes, went forth, guarded on either side by a blooming damsel, and followed by the admiring eyes of his wife, who stood on the wet stones at the door, with her head a little on one side, and the sweetest of smiles on her worn, kind face, looking after him as if he had been a child; and, indeed, Butty’s fat face, when it looked back to nod

to her, was as fair and fresh, in spite of its silver hair, as full of beaming simplicity and radiant consciousness of being good, as any child's.

They had not gone many steps before one of the nieces came running back to say that the Morgans were all coming over the bridge, and that Mr. Ephraim Jones, the great minister, was standing in the King's-square waiting for them.

Chamberlayne took his hat and went out. Mr. Rymer wished Mrs. Hughes "Good-morning!" and followed. He found Chamberlayne standing still a few steps from the door, with his handsome face so bewildered that he hardly knew it as the same he had sat opposite during so many hours yesterday.

The church bell had ceased. Chapel people took the benefit of its warning silence and began to stir. Yes; the great London minister was indeed there, and a most prominent figure he made in the market-place. He was a thick-set, burly, Cromwell-like man, with rough, pimply face; a man who seemed to have been battling through all his long life with the eternal enemy, whether intrenched

within or encamped without, and to have grown strong, bristling, antagonistic ; his very attitude of repose a defiant poise—victorious on the whole, but scarred—and obliged to hold his very conquests by the tenure of perpetual watch. He—the Reverend Ephraim Jones—now stood in the middle of the market-place conversing with Dolgarrog ministers, and watching the approach of four persons.

These were Elias Morgan, his young brother, Hugh, his only child, Hirell, and his house-keeper, Kezia Williams. The slim, youthful figure of Hugh, on whose shoulder Elias's heavy hand now and then fell, as if to give additional weight to some admonition, attracted little attention. It was the elder brother—it was Elias himself, towards whom all eyes were turned.

A short man, but broad-chested, supple-limbed, powerful treading, and with a certain rough dignity in his bearing that compensated for an utter want of grace, both in form and feature. His eyes alone, dark and bright, and shaded with long thick lashes, might have been comely but that there looked out

of them a spirit so inscrutably stern, so piercing and alert, yet withal so immoveably calm. Little passing emotions such as give most human eyes their wondrous variety of expression and light, must have been crushed dead in Elias's broad chest, before they had lived long enough to trouble the stony calmness of his eyes. His square chin, and his lips, thin and firm-set, had the same unflinching look.

When he first came within view of the market-place, Elias was wholly absorbed in his brother, and the counsel he was giving him, as to how he was to meet the snares and temptations of the great world, for which the lad was to leave his mountain home to-morrow. Presently, as he saw Hugh's eyes looking excitedly forward his own followed them, and he suddenly became aware of the stir his approach was creating. His hand dropped from Hugh's shoulder, he slackened his pace, and a scarcely perceptible colour rose in his swarthy cheek ; his mouth somewhat relaxed ; his eyes softened. Chamberlayne watched him in deep anxiety. There was more of happiness in his cousin's face than he had

before seen there. Yes ; Elias Morgan's cup of bliss—bliss after the thirstings of his own stern heart—was full. What ! Did the elect of God honour him for this little humble edifice he was raising on the mountain slope ? How much more would he not yet—God willing !—do for them !

And the poor mountain-farmer, who had been used to earn his bread from hand to mouth till his fortieth year ; Elias, with his narrow notion of things and his boundless faith in God, felt his coming inheritance of seven thousand pounds to be a power in his hands, by which he was to accomplish all sorts of great and divine purposes. He could venture now to snatch a little leisure, in which to perfect the conquest of his own stubborn heart. He was not usually thought a charitable man—for none knew how much he strove to accomplish for those in his own household with the barest means—and therefore could not know the strength of his motives for resistance to ordinary appeals for charity. Now he felt he might be better understood. Hitherto he had had to stint himself in food to spare a penny to a starving tramp. Now !—But he



closed his firm lips suddenly with an expression that seemed to say "Thou knowest!"

With the solemn glory of his dream about him, he advanced into the market-place, to take the two hands Mr. Ephraim Jones, the London minister, stretched out, even while his friend was yet distant.

Chamberlayne did not understand what had caused Elias to quicken his pace; and feeling he must make an effort to deliver his ill news, he went hastily towards him.

"Cousin! Cousin Morgan!"

Elias, strange to say, had either known him at the first glance, or was too much pre-occupied to express any surprise when enlightened by the words addressed to him. He gave him his right hand cordially, while with his left he made a motion towards the group in the market-place, as if to show him he could not then stop.

"Cousin Chamberlayne, is it you?" he said. "Have you come to stay at Bod Elian? You are welcome. Come up to-night, if you like. Only no business, Robert, till to-morrow. The Lord's day this;" and then his half-closed eyes, and moving but mute lips seemed to

say he, of all men, ought to remember that.

“But, Morgan,” began Chamberlayne, hurriedly. His cousin instantly stopped him with a sort of stern good-humour.

“Cousin Chamberlayne, we are late. Bad roads made us so—and the vanities of dress.” And he motioned with his broad hand towards the two women behind him.

To these Chamberlayne, in his despair of any useful effort with Elias, turned, only to have his wits still more confounded. The slender form and fair face of Hirell were familiar to him, but now he found the familiar image painfully, yet bewitchingly strange to him, by the new and wondrous beauties which breathed from it and surrounded it.

No childish, pouting, country beauty, with glowing glances stealing the admiration under which she blushes—for thus had Chamberlayne, with his Kentish experience, and not too brilliant imagination, painted her—and yet no pale statue, coldly perfect, was the daughter of Elias Morgan. Her loveliness was neither of marble nor of roses. Her beauty was a mysterious beauty, which alike

puzzled and charmed Chamberlayne, but which he could not succeed in comprehending. Hirell's form was lithe and slender, and full of wild natural elegance. Its little, wavering, flower-like movements were very pretty, and suggested a constant recollection of its native mountain breezes. But it was not her form that so bewildered Chamberlayne, nor her hazel eyes that glanced up to him full of sweet, fresh dewy light, like sudden gleams of morning; no, it was the thought of her name which had often puzzled him, and which he felt for the first time he understood. Hirell—beam of light—angel! Yes, he felt that since he had last seen her, that wild, restless soul of hers, had become moulded to her name. She was no longer the same being who had run wild races with him in the stony fields of Bod Elian, or sate in the little room at the old Council House, laughing at Butty Hughes. They had taken her away, he felt, her father and those grim old Dissenting ministers, and lifted her from her half-melancholy, half-boisterous childhood, and placed her in a sort of saint-dom, where he, at least, could hold no commune with her. He felt as

if he could not speak to her. He could only stand before her, and feel pain at her entire forgetfulness of him.

He was thinking of her still while Kezia spoke to him. He was wondering if Hirell ever had now those sudden fits of sadness that used to come over her when they were children together ; or those wilder fits of passionate restlessness and longing to break through the iron restraint of her poverty-pinched, lonely mountain home. Surely nothing of this ever troubled Hirell now ! Sweet saintly gravity was on her lips, her eyes were full of joy. Had it all gone from her, this restlessness, he wondered ? Was the beam of light a pure beam, free from all discolorations and dust of earth ? Or—and the thought brought him fresh pain—was this bright joyousness caused by the supposed change in their fortunes ? If it were this indeed, how could he meet her to-day or to-morrow ? How look in her eyes when his news had sent all the sweet light out of them—perhaps for ever ?

At her father's half-jocose allusion to her vanity, which had drawn upon her the sudden

looks of Chamberlayne and his friend, the beautiful Calvinist blushed and trembled, and let fall her carefully-upheld dress ; and in her confusion at seeing the fair, pale silk slip to the wet stones, and herself revealed in all her rich attire, she glanced up and met Mr. Rymer's half-smiling gaze of admiration and of pleasure in what he felt must be Chamberlayne's pleasure at the sight of her. He lifted his hat and bowed when he saw her look at him, and she blushed most painfully, hesitated, then curtsied—so rustic a curtsy that she blushed again to think of it when it was done, and turned to follow her father, quite unconscious that she had neither spoken to nor shaken hands with her kinsman and old playmate, Robert Chamberlayne.

The two young men stood apart, watching the moving masses of figures in the market-place. Elias was holding the minister's hands; and the latter, seeing a strange look of inquiry in Elias's earnest, weather-beaten face, said, in his burly, loud voice, which seemed, however, softer than usual—

“Yes, friend Elias ; I am reminded I didn't come here for the rest I so much coveted

among my old friends; but to do His work. He knows what He is about when he says, 'Take this sorrow,' and wrings out the cry in answer, 'What is it Thou wishest me to do?' Elias, my little boy—my only one—is dead! so this letter has just told me. God help and comfort the poor mother! She is too old to have another child. You can guess, then, how it must have been with us—how it now will be. Enough! Courage, Elias! God is thinking of you and your plans to-day. He means to make me speak out for you. He fills my heart—how, then, can I help but speak? Your cause won't suffer through my loss. It is I who tell you so, but it is He who tells it me. Come!"

Elias had been holding one hand during these words, with a sense of strong, almost passionate yearning to the stricken, but brave man. He now relinquished the hand, and took the proffered arm, and he said in a voice so low and dream-like in tone that it hardly seemed meant for the minister (whose first hearty words of congratulation as to the change of fortune were still ringing in Elias'

ear)—“The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away.”

“Is that all, friend Elias?” sternly asked the minister, stopping at the threshold of the chapel-door to look in the other’s face. “Thou art over-considerate. Dost thou think *I* cannot say what thou art secretly saying — ‘Blessed be the name of the Lord!’”

The hard voice that for its pain might have been the voice of one speaking from the rack, was followed by a burst of children’s voices singing in the school-room, before the service began, a hymn prepared for the occasion. So fresh and soaringly did it rise, that it seemed as if the little singers, unknown to themselves, were charged with God’s tender answer to the words wrung so sternly from the stricken heart.

The minister and Elias lifted up their faces and listened : stirred like veteran soldiers, by the trumpet-call to battle. Hirell looked at them, and from their rugged faces drew to her own a new glory. Forgetful of her fair silks, she folded her hands, and glided in between the two burly figures—a beam of light, indeed !

The inner chapel doors closed. Rymer and Chamberlayne turned, and silently crossed the bridge, on their way to Capel Illtyd. Once more the market-place was grey, sombre, and deserted.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### DOLA' HUDOL.

THE grey house fronts of Dolgarrog were drying in patches as Rymer and Chamberlayne crossed the bridge leading out of the town, and entered upon a road the beauty of which endures even the test of the old Welsh motto, which says, "Nothing is excellent but that which cannot be excelled."

The whole way from Dolgarrog to Aber, where the little river winding through the valley ends in the sea, the road gently ascends. The breeze blows with increasing freshness as you advance. The old walls, built of large stones, are held together by no cement, but only by the roots and stems of innumerable plants; conspicuous among which are the ivy, fern, stone crop, and the vigorous and healthy pennywort, whose round fleshy leaves mimic

the size of every coin in existence, till they become so small and minute that only fairies can need to put such money into their purses. And these old walls grow more and more rich as we recede from the town, till every square yard becomes a kind of inexhaustible treasury for the artist, the poet, and the lover of nature to stand before and study.

And still as the road ascends the openings in the craggy banks on the right show glimpses of fresher green ; the valley on the left broadens ; Criba Ban, stretching its vast bulk above it, and above its many tributary mountain-vassals for a distance of many miles, assumes more distinct and majestic forms ; the magpies flash their dazzling white and black more frequently before the eye ; while the rougher and the more full of obstacles the stones of its shallow bed become, the louder and more determined is the triumphant song of the little river.

Through this road the two men move in an almost unearthly silence, after the first few and faint flashes of conversation have died out. Chamberlayne's eye scarcely quits the line of the road before him, and even of that

he sees little more than the ground upon which he treads.

It is very different with his companion. He too is deeply absorbed ; but unlike Chamberlayne, who can follow but one stream of thought and emotion at one time, Rymer cannot help but see and feel, even though it be almost unconsciously, the influences around him. And thus, while the secret thoughts that so strongly possess him keep his spirits fluctuating like jets of flame in unwholesome air, he cannot help but stop now and then, gaze round half-incredulously, then, with a quick, impatient step, rejoin his companion, and then once more let his eye and fancy go free through those exquisite regions of earth and air.

It is strange how differently these glimpses of the landscape affect him at different moments—deepening his sadness when he is sad, increasing his exaltation of spirit when some flattering surmise happens to elate him—or making more restless and feverish his ordinary mood, which is one of the deepest anxiety.

About a mile from Dolgarrog he stood still

before a scene, the charm of which, to an eye like his, was as sudden and potent as a strain of exquisite melody to an unexpectant ear. And truly all the chords of beauty were here gathered to one perfect, silent, harmonious work, by the Divine Musician.

Two mountains stood near together—one a little in advance of the other. The farthest was of tender purple ; the other, clasped by the sunshine bursting from the clouds, was of deep, bright green ; and they stood so leaning together as to form a sort of mighty gateway to a world of mountains beyond, the edges of which could just be individually seen, and all of which repeated the colours of the two in fainter and more exquisite tints, till the curving lines — purple beyond green, and green beyond purple, ceased against the sky. As Rymer stood before this mountain gateway, and looked in upon this mountain world, it seemed to him, that, from its wondrously dewy freshness, and freedom from all trace of life but that of trees, clouds, waters, birds, and sunlight, and of all which helped to make its beauty, it might be appearing from under the rising mist for the first time since its

creation. The faint, rainy sunshine met the majestic heads, and the coloured slopes, and crept from one to another as if bewildered by excess of beauty—now fainting on the bosom of the hill where it lay—then awakening, and with sudden passion clasping all. Still Rymer stood and gazed upon the scene. He only gazed. There was not a thought dared to enter.

He had chosen actual darkness in the first agony of his disappointment, and had chosen to consider himself in the dark ever since. Could he dare to see now? If he allowed himself to remove this mental bandage he had put before his eyes, to perceive the majesty of these heads—the colours of these slopes—the inexhaustible tenderness of the valley depths between—must he not see more, much more, which he did not wish to see; which he dared not, would not, see? But for one moment the “seeing” had come; and with it an indescribable sadness. Then back into the darkness and onward again.

And the darkness had begun to have a subtle charm of its own: he turned towards it with a glad exhilaration, to which the freshening air and increasing wildness added

every minute, and seemed to give a false glow of health and naturalness.

The wind—its wing no longer clogged by the rain that had weighed it down so many days—rose and swept on with exultant voice ; tearing the white mists from the valleys, and the blue mists from the mountains ; creeping, conspirator-like, into the woods, and setting the friendliest trees by the ears ; dividing itself into millions of genii to seize and shake dry each blade of grass in a whole field, and making the solitary little flower on the hill-side laugh its blue-bell empty of tears ; pausing, now, to make a loud, jubilant song to the waterfall's music ; then, like a careless shepherd, who suddenly remembers his neglected sheep, halloing to the grey straggling clouds, and driving them before him with a tyrant's fury, till his own strength is exhausted, and he lags with weak, puffing breath behind.

Presently there appeared, above the wall on the left, a bit of rich swelling park land, on which Robert Chamberlayne's eyes rested with a pleased look.

"That's Dola' Hudol," said he ; "most

likely the people from there, with a tourist or two and ourselves, will be all the congregation at the English service this morning."

"This place, then," asked Rymer, "is owned by an English family, is it?"

"Mrs. Rhys is English," answered Chamberlayne, without noticing the light that kindled his companion's eyes as they both drew to the other side of the road, and stood on a low wall, the better to see up the slope to the knoll of trees in the distance, where, all but completely hidden, stood the plain Tudor mansion built of the greyest, coldest stone.

"Yes; and they make enough of it," answered the farmer, a little contemptuously; "they have even named the house from the fields. Dola' Hudol means 'the fascinating meadows,' I have heard; but there's some story connected with these, Hirell Morgan once told me—I forget all about it now though."

One of the paths,—the beginnings and endings of which Rymer's eye was busily trying to discover,—came winding from the house to a little door in the wall near where they stood. Down just before the door was

a stone placed over a noisy little channel of water. It was green underneath, and on the top thickly cushioned with moss. It was like a tiny antique drawbridge to some fairy castle.

“What exquisite moss!” said Rymer, and stooping he took up a little piece from the old stone, and raising it as if enjoying its fresh peculiar scent, he bent over it as it lay in his palm some time, touching it with his lips with a stealthy tender reverence.

A little later, as the two walked on, leaving Dola' Hudol behind them, he crushed it in his hand in a sort of scorn of himself. What foot could have trodden upon it? The little door was not in use—the ivy grew about it in chains and bars—but as he crushed it, it thrilled him, and by some strange power kept his fingers from unclosing and casting it away.

They were now on Capel Illtyd bridge, looking down on the old Roman causeway, as it lay visible beneath the beautiful water; and Chamberlayne pointed to where, low down on the right, lay the old Abbey-farm, where he had spent his school-days. The



smoke rising above the trees—a few cows grazing in the fields—a woman in a blue spotted jacket washing potatoes in the river, using an old basket as a sieve,—these seemed at first to be the only signs of life visible. But looking up the grey mountain sides, Rymer saw a few dreary stone cottages, and two or three miners sitting at the doors—English probably, thinking of English homes, by the way in which they sat gazing across the valley and over the crowding mountain heads. From here the two men could see in the direction opposite to the mountain gateway to the end of the valley; where the turbulent little river met the sea, whose black swollen lips spat at it livid foam that blew hither and thither, scarcely distinguishable from the white seagulls. The meadows all the way were dotted with lakes by the last rough tide. A heron stalked upon a sandy little island by itself. Clouds of strange birds were glutting on the drenched pastures—the whole scene was wild, watery, and desolate.

At the top of the steep bit of road they were ascending, stood the tollgate, to the left

of which is the village of Capel Illtyd ; and to the right the church. Turning towards this they entered upon a road like a Swiss mountain pass, and in a few minutes came upon the church, a very small and primitive-looking building.

The chief part of the little congregation attending the Welsh service had gone, and were seen dotting the far-away road to Aber, which appeared cut like a shelf in the mountain ; but Rymer and Chamberlayne met a few solemn-looking communicants leaving the churchyard—some grave old men, and soberly-attired women in their long cloaks and high-crowned hats. They stood aside to let them pass, then looked along the road for signs of the English congregation, but saw none ; and Chamberlayne began to have a doubt as to whether there was to be an English service at all.

They paced up and down the grey slate paving-stones for a few minutes, looking at and trying to read the inscriptions on the graves, and glancing expectantly along the quiet road,—Chamberlayne carelessly, and almost hoping to see no one, that he might the

sooner join his old friend and tutor, and confide to him all his trouble and perplexity concerning his relatives ; Rymer with a studied indifference, beneath which was hidden a torturing suspense that made him feel as if time were standing still by his side, and waiting with him.

The wet September foliage rustled against the dark little church-windows ; a few yellow leaves fluttered about the grey tombs and green grass, and suspense cut it all much too sharply on his heart for the picture ever to be effaced. Every time they reached the little square porch, as they paced up and down, they heard a dry, patient cough from the clerk within ; and every time they reached the gate they heard nothing but birds and running water—no sound of wheel or of foot-fall on the road.

“I think no one will be coming now,” said Chamberlayne, at last ; “we had better walk on towards the Abbey-farm till Mr. Lloyd overtakes us.”

He led the way out of the churchyard, and Rymer followed him. He still held the bit of moss, crushing it in his hand with a fierce

grief, as if, having come from her door, some pity or hope might be wrung from it. He walked on, and the lovely, still life of that road was hateful to his straining eye and ear.

Midway between the church and the toll-gate, they heard a strange sort of call ; and, looking back, they saw a man standing at the gate of the church, beckoning them.

"That's old Jones, the clerk," said Chamberlayne, looking annoyed and perplexed.

"We must have made some mistake—they are there ; they must have come some other way, the English family you mentioned," said Rymer, hurriedly.

"There is another door ; but they must have been waiting in the churchyard ever since we've been, if they are there ; for there's no other road from Dola' Hudol," answered Chamberlayne.

"Let us go back ; they must be there!" Rymer said, in a sharp, decisive tone, which he often used to conceal some strong emotion.

The gaunt, old clerk, in his threadbare coat and spectacles, beckoned determinedly, almost angrily, till they came up to him at the gate.

Then he went to the porch, and beckoned till they reached him there.

Then they entered the church, and, in a minute, made the discovery that with the exception of the clergyman and the clerk, they were the only persons in the building.

Rymer was horribly annoyed, and glanced round more than once in the hope of retreat. But Robert Chamberlayne's old tutor began immediately, leaving them no choice as to staying or going ; and it was as strange a thing as either had ever experienced, to feel that the service had really begun and would be gone through entirely on their behalf.

There was a humourous side as well as a solemn one to the position, and the men both felt the humour more than the solemnity. The clergyman felt it a little also, and there was an odd twinkle in his eye that showed a certain enjoyment in his task. The Reverend Daniel Lloyd had two gifts seldom found in one man ; great energy of mind and extreme quietness of manner. His energy was not of the feverish, dry, exhaustive kind ; but was a bright, dewy, refreshing energy, which seemed to have no end. His small, gray eye,

shone as bright in his dry-skinned, sunburnt, hale-looking face, as a clear spring of water in a rock ; his voice was sweet, and had a rich sort of grit in it, and had a dry, mellow music peculiar to itself ; his hair was gray ; his form tall and slight, but erect and hardy. He did not read the prayers, but prayed them, and the Psalms he read as poems. He did what scarcely anybody else could have done that morning—drew Rymer's thoughts from himself.

But this was not for long. As he sat, his attention divided idly between Daniel Lloyd's small vigorous head and the quaint primitive funereal plates of metal that decorated the walls, there was a slight sound at the door.

A rush of heat that no power of will could hide came to Rymer's face.

What was it ? Was it not the branches that he had heard brushing against the windows and door, as he paced up and down the churchyard with Chamberlayne ? No—the clerk was rising ; he saw some one then.

The clerk walked to the door. Then Rymer heard his footsteps and those of another. Yes, of another, that made his very throat

swell and throb with a strength that threatened to break the silence. Then he heard a pew-door opened and shut some way behind him ; and the clerk returned to his seat, and the next minute a new voice was joining Chamberlayne's in the responses ; a sweet, rich, young tremulous voice, that held Rymer's mute, and for the moment so filled his soul with joy, that he felt repaid for all he had suffered in that little grey-tombed churchyard, in which a grave had seemed to lie waiting for his last fragile, darling hope.

Robert Chamberlayne, in his impatience to transfer some of his own anxiety concerning the Morgans to Daniel Lloyd's shoulders, was hoping he would not think so small a congregation worth a sermon ; for he remembered he had sometimes omitted it on such occasions ; but his former tutor had no such intention now, and never had Chamberlayne heard him preach with more vigour and homely eloquence. He spoke of the smallness of his congregation, and as in no wise regretting it. He even said that were only one present, that one might perhaps receive more good than great numbers ; for as he would have no

neighbour to whom to pass on Christ's message he must perforce take it to himself.

When he finished, the clerk, who had been fast asleep, woke with a start, and got up and opened the door of the pew where Chamberlayne and his friend sat.

They came out and followed him down the aisle, Chamberlayne, engrossed in looking for half-a-crown for the clerk, who was an old acquaintance of his, followed him to the door ; and Rymer came after them—slowly—very silently and slowly.

He had to approach a large square pew, with armorial bearings on the panels, before turning to the door.

He approached the pew very slowly, and as he did so was looking into a face that was regarding him with amazement, fear, and agitation.

The pew belonged to Mr. Owen Rhys, of Dola' Hudol, and the face which looked over it was that of his wife, Catherine Rhys.

It was a full Saxon face with large blue eyes, fair hair, and a rose-like richness of complexion ; and there was in its beauty an indescribable depth, like the folded mystery of



a rich garden-rose, the power of whose hidden graces breathes through the visible beauty, till that which is apparent appears less than that which is felt to be concealed.

It was a face which had in it the same kind of loveliness that pervades the earth in very early summer, or rather, in full and perfect spring, when the softness, and bloom, and perfume of all things are richest ; when the wild hyacinths rise under the trees, between the thickly-spreading surface roots, in gleaming lines of azure ; when the yellow cream of May has settled thickly on the fields ; when the breath and blush of the first rose offers consolation for the fading lilacs, and the falling of the fragile hawthorn ; when the green Guelder rose is but half blanched, and the honeysuckle has just opened the end of one of its clusters of tiny bugles, and blown its first sweet, joyful *reveillie* in perfume to the summer.

The very spirit of this time was in her face : —the softness, the bloom, the fresh abundant health and 'life—nothing lost or lessened, but all deepened and intensified by being human. There was nothing of the ethereal part of very early spring, the childlike innocence, or arch-

wildness ; and there was nothing of the wearied heaviness, the fierce splendour, or voluptuous languor of July ; it was all bright May—eager, fervent, passionate, but dewy and healthful as the morning breeze.

Surprise seemed to take from Mrs. Rhys all power of concealing the agitation which the sudden appearance of Rymer caused her. The colour in her cheek at first paled ; then, under his fixed and passionate gaze, returned, and burned in it with angry vividness. As he passed, he saw her anger and surprise lessening, her lip quiver, her deep blue eyes fill and droop. He went away towards the open door, listening with the air of one who is certain of a coming step. Then he heard the sound of her pew-door, and with almost unnaturally keen perception, knew it was herself had opened it.

The expected and waited-for step came—weak—uncertain. He did not look back, but all the light that was mounting before his dazzled eyes over Criba Ban, and showing him for the first time the grand range, bare of cloud and mist, to the very summits—seemed caused by that step's approach ; which, from

the long hidden heights of his hope, was sending the mists flying, and lighting all with the old warmth and beauty.

He stood just without the church-door ; the step was almost on the threshold, when it paused, and his heart seemed to pause too, as on the threshold of something to which it yearned, but could not move save with that step. Yes, that step was still ; then he heard the sound of a faint rustling, like the dragging of a weary wing, not *to* the door and to him, but away ; back into the silent aisle ! He turned, he listened ; looking with wild eyes into the cold, still place. He saw nothing, but, as he looked, heard a long-laboured sob, and in it a name—and the name was that of the clergyman to whom he had just been listening.

He understood then. She had turned back, and appealed to him !

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE ANSWERING CHORD.

DURING the next two or three hours Mr. Rymer wandered about irresolutely.

Going back towards Dola' Hudol, he met a man whom he had seen crossing the fields from Dola' Hudol. To this person he addressed himself.

"Excuse me, my friend, stopping you, but I want to ask you whose house that is just before us?"

"My master's, Mr. Rhys!"

"You are——?"

"His game-keeper."

"And who is he?—some fortunate mill-owner from Lancashire, or——"

"You had better not ask him that question," said the man dryly.

"Why?"

"Of course," said the gamekeeper, "you're quite an Englishman, and with the usual Englishman's knack for showing his ignorance of, and contempt for the people among whom he happens to be."

"I fear so, except as regards the contempt," said Rymer, taking off his hat, and bowing with a mock humility that only increased the gamekeeper's irritation, "but I am very willing to learn."

"Mr. Rhys, then, is the descendant of a Welsh prince, whose ancestors ruled a brave, happy, and illustrious people, while England was little better than a flock of silly sheep, and worried by Danes, Norwegians, and Saxons at pleasure."

"The Welshmen, also, I think, gave us an occasional early taste of the amenities of genial neighbours — did they not?" asked Rymer; and the gamekeeper became so eloquent in his answer, that by the time he had come to a full pause, he had discovered the English tourist was certainly a good listener, and had possibly therefore learnt somewhat. So he said to him,

"Are you fond, sir, of old books and manuscripts?"

"Very. Is Dola' Hudol rich that way?"

"Stuffed full! and they're of immense value.—Heirlooms. They've one manuscript there,—the green book of Dola' Hudol they call it,—that no Welshman would exchange for the crown of England; no, nor give away even its least precious leaves, leaf by leaf, in exchange for gem by gem of the Regalia."

"And is the house visible?"

"Not now. Not since yesterday!"

"What's the matter? Some tourist outrage?"

"O dear no! Mrs. Rhys has come home—that's all."

"That's all," echoed Rymer. "It is shewn then when the family are away?"

"O yes."

"Well, my friend, let me tell you, I admire more perhaps than I ought to do—these old families and their old homes—and shall be inclined to tread most reverently the halls and corridors of the descendant of a Welsh prince. Take this," he said, handing the gamekeeper half-a-sovereign, "for a slight acknowledgment of the pleasure your talk has given. I wish, honestly, my man cared half

as much about me and mine, or could speak as eloquently about them. But I don't know what ails you Welshmen. You seem all to me born gentlemen, whatever your station in life ; and as to your language, I cannot, for the life of me, understand the why or wherefore, but I notice that if a Welshman speak English at all, he speaks it to perfection, and puts to shame the speech of the humbler among my own countrymen."

This might be banter, and certainly was not spoken in entire sincerity. It may also be a question whether such truth as there was would have been so demonstratively expressed under any other circumstances. Anyhow, he spoke of real facts he had noticed ; and consequently there mingled with the unreality of his tone something deeper and more genuine. The effect was irresistible. The gamekeeper coloured with pleasure, his eye laughed, and his voice rang out as he apologized to the stranger for his previous expressions.

"And now," said Rymer, "can't you get me a peep inside ? It's Sunday, I know, but your curate, I have heard, once showed on a

Sunday the old abbey where he lives, to a friend who could not wait for Monday. That's just my case. I am going back to England immediately, and feel a strong desire to see what I call a typical Welsh gentleman's house. I daresay you think I could find no more favourable example?"

"That's very certain, sir, and thank you for your liberality; but if it's given with a view—" and he held the coin out, as if to return it.

"It's not given for anything in the world but to enable me to please myself in pleasing you, if you are not too proud to accept it."

"Well, sir," said the Welshman, as he pocketed the half-sovereign with considerable satisfaction, "it seems a trifle to refuse you, and perhaps it might be managed; but great offence was once given to Mr. Rhys by a party of visitors who were, as a special favour, allowed to see the principal ruins while the family were in residence—"

"But he is not here, is he?"

"No, and to be sure that makes a difference! For his lady wouldn't say a word against our admitting a stranger—if he were



really a gentleman—except for the sake of disobedience to orders. Well, sir, I think I'll venture, if I may be sure you will keep close to me, so that there may be no risk of annoyance."

"Don't doubt that."

"Well, sir, I think, knowing the place and its ways so well as I do, I may manage to show you what is best worth seeing, without coming across my mistress."

Rymer heard, but said nothing, and followed the gamekeeper silently.

As the stranger became more reserved and silent, the gamekeeper became only the more chatty; and told the history of a certain family, the chief member of which had committed suicide through finding himself unable to pay a debt of honour—a touching piece of domestic tragedy, which Rymer would have listened to with interest at any time but the present.

He was now feeling the full significance of his position—was realising the nature of the perilous path along which he strode, as if no giddy precipice were on either hand, no termination to the vista beyond, that even the boldest spirits might be unwilling to face.

Thus they reached Dola' Hudol; when a new trouble affected Rymer that he had not, in the intense pre-occupation of a determined purpose, previously thought of. Was he now being seen by Mrs. Rhys, as they approached? Would she again fly from him? Or would she not feel so deep a resentment as to arm herself against all further consideration for him, and denounce him, and expose him before her husband's servants?

"To his great edification!" said Rymer, grimly, to himself. "Not a bad stroke of policy on her part, if—"

He did not finish the sentence, for they had now reached the house, and without—so far as Rymer's keen eyes could discern, as they ranged incessantly from window to window—attracting the least attention from any one within.

It was a great infliction to him to have to deal with the intelligence and zeal of his companion. He would have given the diamond ring from his finger—her gift—so he felt, to have exchanged the gamekeeper for the ordinary show-woman, with her monotonous cut and dry sentences, and utter carelessness

as to what he thought, how he looked or moved, so long as he did not linger too long, nor touch forbidden things.

Through half an hour of almost intolerable torture did he vainly strive to listen to talk that he knew he ought to attend to, if only to keep off suspicion ; while, in fact, every sound was full of pain and alarm, for it confused what he was striving to make clear with all the faculties of his soul — those other sounds all so soft and remote, which whispered to him of the rustle of a dress, or the fall of a light foot, a distant word of direction, or a question put to a servant — sounds so delicate, that he feared to lose them in the thicker stream of the game-keeper's voice.

Suddenly he was startled into consciousness by the remark—

“You are tired, sir, I see ; and can't take much interest in the place.”

“No, no, you are deceived ; I never was more interested in my life. Talk on, and don't mind me.”

For a few minutes Rymer managed, with great effort, to preserve a manner more

obviously suitable to the character he had assumed ; but it wearied him so much that in a wanton spirit he threw all further attempt aside, and stalked on, gloomily listening to everything said, gloomily looking at everything shown, but perfectly unconscious of any one fact whatever, except this—*she* was near him ; and yet he was failing to find her, or even to get the slightest trace of her whereabouts.

“What’s that?” he said suddenly, in a voice so low and significant, that the game-keeper was startled, and fancied the stranger had caught some sounds that he too ought to hear and did not.

“I—I mean—the—singing !” said Rymer, with an attempt at indifference.

“O that ! I couldn’t imagine, sir, what you heard. O that’s only Mrs. Rhys, singing ; she’s a fine singer, they say—though an Englishwoman.” The Welshman said this with a sly smile.

“It does indeed seem exquisite. I wish I could hear it more plainly.”

“Do you ? Well, I have a message for her, so I’ll go in, and leave the door open be-

hind me—then you'll perhaps get half a minute or so."

"Stay. What if she were to come out while I am here?"

"She will not do that. I shall tell her what I have done ; she's sure, then, not to be angry."

"Very well. Give me as long as you can. The air is one I should like to hear through, if it were possible."

"Please, sir, to be very silent, and do not move at all till I come back !"

"I will not."

The gamekeeper went to the other end of the corridor, in which they stood, and tapped lightly.

"Come in !" said a voice that seemed even still richer in its own natural music than in aught that it had artistically learned.

Rymer stood, listening ; breathless, moveless, gazing at that opening door which did not reveal her when fully open, and which was then partially reclosed.

He could not hear distinctly what the gamekeeper said to her, and yet felt certain from the tone that he began by giving his own

independent message, and that it was to that the sweet pathetic voice replied, wearily,

“Very well.”

Then again there was silence for a moment.

And then, while Rymer wondered if the gamekeeper’s courage had failed him about the intruding visitor, and whether she would begin again the singing, he heard the man’s heavy steps moving not towards, but away from him, Rymer.

“What on earth does that portend?” he asked himself.

“You will find it, James, I think, on the dining-room table; I am sorry to trouble you,” Mrs. Rhys said, in a raised voice.

She had then sent the man for something.

Truly Rymer felt it to be a wonderful piece of good fortune. He might venture in, and in half a minute might do that for which alone he had come hither.

But even as he moved with fixed resolution to his purpose, he heard Mrs. Rhys’ voice rise again, very falteringly, it seemed, then grow stronger, and then it sang to Welsh words the exquisitely pathetic air, *Ar hyd y nos*, but

not to the end ; there was an inexplicable sinking and diminishing of the rich full tones—then fresh effort and struggle—almost a conquest—then a low cry of intensest anguish, and—then what Rymer dared not even to picture to himself, through the ominous silence.

Unmanned for the moment by this, he changed his resolution, and wrote hurriedly in his note-book these words :

“ I am here, listening to you, but quite unknown and unsuspected, as a tourist visitor. Judge by that of the value of my word when I say I *will* see you—once—whatever may come of it.

“ But that shall be our last interview, if you choose.

“ Hear me then, as I must also hear you, once for all. Then I accept, absolutely, your decision, however fatal.

“ Come, alone, to the place called the Maiden’s lake, at dusk this afternoon. There is a catchpenny gold-finder there on week days, whom people go to see make experiments in washing for gold dust. He will be

absent to-day. We may meet there — as strangers, without risk to you ; and find no one but ourselves.

“Strike a chord upon your instrument, to say yes ; I will not take no—not even if I have to seek you here again after your husband’s arrival. Destroy this.”

While this was being written, Rymer expected every instant to be stopped by the returning gamekeeper, till he remembered his own request to the man, and saw how easily the slight commission given to him by Mrs. Rhys might be and no doubt was being consciously used for Rymer’s benefit.

Tearing the leaves out, he strode stealthily towards the still partially open door—paused—drew himself up—seemed to hesitate as to the shock the sight of him might give Mrs. Rhys,—perhaps also as to his promise to the gamekeeper,—so hastily rolled the leaves round the only convenient weight he could find, a half-crown, and threw it against a part of the wall he could just see.

Glass crashed — and was followed by a slight scream — which was instantly inter-



rupted, as if in sudden consciousness of the possible meaning of the incident.

It was the glass of a picture that had been broken. Strange enough too, the drawing was a water-colour drawing of Mrs. Rhys herself.

Rymer seemed to hear each separate beat of his own heart, as he listened to hear how she would act.

He was not long left in doubt. Of course she could not choose but deal some way with an incident so compromising. She crossed the room. Rymer saw her, and saw her stoop—saw how carefully she chose not to see him—saw that then she went away back, and most probably to her former seat at, or near, the piano.

The gamekeeper—who had stayed to the utmost verge of what he had dared—now returned ; and Rymer, who was standing so much nearer than before, could hear him give his not very confident explanation about the visitor outside.

A long and embarrassing silence followed, before Mrs. Rhys made any kind of comment. Then she said, with a tone of severity through

which Rymer could feel every thrill of her heart,—

“I shall say nothing now, James, but if this happens again, I am sure Mr. Rhys will discharge you. You need not wait.”

Scarcely knowing how best to excuse himself, James uttered a few faltering words, and hurried away; and being already angry at the reproof he had incurred, was still more angry to find the tourist almost close to the door, instead of being where he had left him—a long and respectful way off.

“I have got into trouble on your account, sir, and must beg you to hasten your departure,” he said somewhat roughly.

“Many thanks. You may want a friend some day,—if so I shall remember this.”

The gamekeeper was mollified, and even showed him certain other objects of interest that did not involve further penetration into the recesses of the mansion; and he found that his visitor seemed to linger more over these comparatively trifling articles of vertu, than he had done while examining the most priceless of the heirlooms of Dola’ Hudol.

At last, though most unwillingly, the man

was obliged to repeat his warning to Mr. Rymer, about his too long stay ; and though, again, the latter by his coolness and presence of mind, was able to say something which obtained him another minute or two, all resources and expedients were failing, and he was at the door ; and still he had not heard the chord he had demanded in signs of acquiescence.

But when the door was opened—and it was a door that could only be noisily opened—Rymer understood the delay ; for as its harsh, jarring sound, as it was thrown back against the wall, ceased, there came through an open window, one loud, wild, stormy chord from the instrument, then sudden silence ; and then the sharp, impetuous closing of the window a moment later, which suggested to Rymer thoughts so confused and intricate, that he could not even in fancy disentangle them.

“ No matter—she *will* meet me !” he muttered to himself.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE MAIDEN'S LAKE.

THE intervening hours were spent in wandering about in places where Rymer thought himself most secure from observation. As sunset drew on, he loitered before a lane about three miles along the road to the right of Capel Illtyd toll-gate.

It was a fine golden October afternoon ; but he looked impatient with its very brightness, as if that for which he waited and watched would not appear till the evening, and yet he could not help waiting and watching, though the sun still burnished the spare autumnal boughs above him, so that they shone like wreaths and wands of dusky Indian gems.

He strolled up and down, and time lagged heavily. He grew sick of the thin-looking crops of the corn-fields, where children were gleaning on his left—because the shadows

were so slow in creeping over them ; sick of the tiny river flashing through the trees on his right, because its restless silver was still stamped with day's bright image ; sick of the burnishing, transforming sun, because it was so long in gathering to itself its beamy offspring, that lay sleeping on tree, and field, and dell, in such heavy languor.

He watched, and paced, and wearied, and as he looked at his watch, often doubted if the hands really moved at all.

But the slow reaper and his scythe came on, as surely as slowly, and cut the day down like a flower ; and as it lay dying and flooding the earth with sweetness, even in death, Rymer left the road by the lane on the right, and entered into a wonderful labyrinth of sylvan passages ; airily roofed and walled by hazels, aspens, and willows ; and paved with moss, red leaves, white stones and grey ; lights and shadows all mingling and blending in mosaic richness.

Some slight sound meeting his ear made him start and pause to listen with head inclined forward, and eye kindling and dilating. Then he pressed on with a rapid noiseless

step, till he reached a small and beautiful sheet of water, walled on one side by the bending trees, dropping their foliage across like a curtain ; and on the other by a quaint little bridge, from which the ivy hung so low as to touch the surface of the water.

There was a dainty elfish elegance about the spot ; the blocks of rock that rose from the water in stately forms, were as smooth and polished, and almost as white as alabaster, and suggested the idea of their having been the resting-places of some troop of tiny bathing nymphs. The lake itself was clear as glass, shallow, and paved with smooth fair pebbles.

Rymer stood at the water's edge, and listened till the faint sound he had heard became nearer and more distinct. It was, as he had thought, the sound of footsteps.

He listened as they fell—now light on the stones, now crisp on the dry leaves, now silent on the moss ; and he never turned till they paused very close to him. Then with an expression in which mingled tender welcoming, self abasement, fear, and reproach, he looked round into the face of the person, who had

come to keep this appointment with him at the Maiden's Lake.

It was Mrs. Rhys.

As he turned towards her she lifted her veil, and he saw that her cheeks were very white, and her blue eyes and rounded lips were contorted with an expression of scorn and bitter grief.

From old habit he held out his hand, but she refused it by a slight, ever so slight a gesture, and looked steadily into his face.

"And is this you," she said in a voice whose trembling weakness she tried to turn to sternness—"Is it possible it is John Cunliff who has brought me here to meet him, by this—this honourable letter; this delicate threat which he knows I can no more help trembling at, than I can help despising it and him now that I *have* come."

Cunliff was silent. He was reminded at that instant of how he felt when a child, suffering from ghostly horrors in the night, he had cried aloud and brought the household to his room; his relief, his acute shame, and acute joy, then resembled that which he now experienced.

"Why did you not let me see your true character before?" continued the voice that made his heart tremble with its sweetness and anger. "It might have saved me some misery. I thought you braver, more humane, more chivalrous than most men, and what must I now think of you—you who could write this letter, threatening me, threatening my husband's peace, your own life, anything—anything to frighten and terrify my already most miserable heart?"

"O Catherine, Catherine! have *you* been brave? Must it not be a cruel and unjust judge who passes a sentence she dares not deliver with her own lips?"

"Well, I have come now. I will deliver it with my own lips if you demand it. This is to be the last time we two meet. Is that plain?"

He looked down on the grass and repeated the words as though they were of a language but half known, and he was uncertain of the accent of each:—

"This is to be — the — last — time — we meet."

"And may you be forgiven," said Catherine,



turning away her face, "for bringing upon us the bitterness of such a last meeting!"

He did not reply, and she moved as if she would leave him.

At the first few steps his eyes looked up with a gleam of water in them; then as if drawn towards her in spite of her stinging words, which chained his feet, he fell or threw himself after her retreating form; and his clasped hands fell on the edge of her dress, as it swept the grass, and detained her.

She turned and looked down upon him. Her fair girlish forehead was drawn up in such lines as belong to age, her round underlip was held from quivering by the pressure of her teeth.

"Take care," she said in a voice of great anguish; "Cunliff, we are not alone."

"No? Who is here—Rhys? With his pistols perhaps? Is there any such merciful end in store for me?"

"Mr. Cunliff, one is here without whom I dared not have come."

"Ah! your confessor at the church? To whom you have exposed me, I suppose?"

"No, he knows nothing—shall know nothing, but that you are one whom it is not for my soul's health to be permitted to stay here."

"And this meddler is near us now?"

"He is."

"I thank you, Catherine."

"Oh, don't make me repent more than I already do, having obeyed your command!"

She seemed to feel how deeply he was stung and humiliated, for she said in a softened tone :

"It is useless to speak of my regret in giving you this pain—must not every thing that brings us together be painful now? There I will wait—I will sit down"—and gently drawing her dress from his hands, she sat on a piece of the beautiful white rock that rose from the moss. "Say what you wish to say, I will be patient if you will be generous. We will part as friends—as dear ones if you will—only I conjure you reflect well beforehand on all you say to me. The present is very, very, bitter—the past has been humiliating—let us leave some possible consolation for the future. We are neither of us very

fervent Christians, Mr. Cunliff—but we have I think a little real faith in a life to come, where the evil or the goodness of our acts here will be of consequence to us.”

“Oh yes! how glibly a woman can talk when she is mistress of herself, when she knows and acts out all her own secret purposes, with the most admirable self-command, when in a word the man loves her with his whole heart and soul, while she only loves him with strict attention to the proprieties.”

She seemed about to answer him in his own way, but the angry impulse died out; she sighed deeply and said:

“You shall not offend me by this wild talk, for I can only too well understand it. But I must tell you my husband is at this moment not many miles away. It is dangerous for me to be here, he is so likely to arrive during my absence. Do not then, I entreat you, waste the time in meaningless reproaches.”

Then, as he lay, he began to pick up the small pebbles that lay about him, and throw them into the stream, now with an affectation of utter indifference, now with a quick passionate, vindictive gesture; and as one after

another fell into the water, and sank, deeper grew the gloom in both their hearts, sadder the sense of their utter hopelessness. Cunliff was the first to renew the discourse :—

“ I have found a profitable occupation, you see, but still it is not half so profitable as the one you taught me ; that of throwing every thought and faculty, every energy and hope into the unfathomable gulf of a professing woman's love.”

“ Did I *profess* to love you ?”

“ No you only made me think you professed it.”

“ Did I even do that ?” she asked.

“ God knows, I cannot say ! The upshot of the matter is, we have been as two gamblers playing for a great stake ; but I did not know you played with false dice ; and so, now that I have lost all I played for, you need not wonder if I am sore and complain.”

She was about to rise, but his look restrained her. There was something terrible in his face. Her own face changed as she saw his, her eyes dropped, and for the moment she felt as though all her senses—kept so long on the rack—were about to leave her.

He on his side saw, and had seen the passionate resentment slowly gathering in her heart ; and he had consciously fed it, yet not without a certain quickening sense in his blood of the perilousness of the process, which presently assumed the mastery, and impelled him to change his manner and tone, which became full of an inexpressible tenderness and melancholy, and made the tears for the first time rush to Mrs. Rhys' eyes ; as she sat with averted face listening to him.

“ You asked me, I think, why I brought you here. I do not know whether I can tell you, without much more talk of myself than I find it agreeable to contemplate. Let me own, however, I am not the brute I have seemed. I did not bring you here to punish you for giving me some gleams of light, some moments of happiness, some fancies and hopes of so winning a nature, that even now that I understand their hollowness, I am fool enough to wish like a child, that they might all again return to me, to mock me once more. Do you know what I was when we first met ? But I am mad to ask the question. A pure heart and soul like yours :—”

An agitated voice interrupted him :—

“ Do not say anything like that again to me. The punishment is greater than I can bear.”

“ You would I suppose refuse to believe me if I told you as I do now, with a calm voice, in quiet and deliberate words, and speaking, I hope, with entire possession of my sanity, as yet at least, that it is because you are so pure, so sweet, so intrinsically good, that I compare you with the mass of your fellow-women, and wonder no longer at my own love and worship, or, if you will, at my own infatuation. I have found but one bit of solid ground, one real, true, beautiful, divine thing, one influence of good springing up, I scarce know how, into wondrously productive activity;—but this is all mere words—words ; what shall I say of it that can even distantly shadow forth its miraculous powers;—what but this, it transformed even me ? Call it by what name you please, but do not deny that we have known love. Catherine Rhys, look on me—here, grovelling at your feet, and believe what I say, that even if you desert me, still it behoves you to let me know henceforward, I

have known one true woman, have had the grace to love her, and in my heart-felt devotion to her, have thus some claim to be satisfied, that I too, am not utterly beyond redemption. The worst has come and must be endured, I know that—yes, I know it—we cannot undo what is done, then let us draw out of it whatever of benefit we can. You love me, Catherine, or you have bitterly deceived me. You have known what has been passing within my heart for many months—you will not deny *that?*”

“No—you know that I cannot—and you ask it to make me hate myself still more than I do already,” Mrs. Rhys answered bitterly.

“No—only to make you do me one last act of justice, Catherine.”

“Justice! we have both forgotten it towards ourselves and towards—him. What justice can I do you, Mr. Cunliff?”

“Tell me that this very misery with which I go away is not come of an empty dream—a mockery—tell me you *have* loved me. We have been so silent in our hours of happiness. We have felt ourselves so wise in reading each other’s thoughts. I may have been misled, or

may fancy I have. Don't think it will weaken me to have the sweetness of the truth as well as the bitterness. Since I go, Catherine, give me the words that staying I might never have asked for, and I will go with such terrible contentment as is alone possible for me, if only I may bear with me the unchallenged possession of my one jewel, my sweet amulet, my precious talisman, my only—only earthly possession that I can care for, and gloat over, and draw light and comfort from, in the dreary awful years to come. Catherine, you know what that is—the knowledge of your love.”

“Cunliff, you press me hardly, inconsiderately, cruelly. I think of another beside you. I must think of him—will think of him. He deserves all I can give him—and shall have it.”

“Ay—curse him! No—do not be angry. Doubt not I curse myself with infinitely keener tongue.”

Again she essayed to rise, and again he detained her, but with so much of pleading, passionate entreaty, that she once more yielded, with the murmur—



"Cunliff, see how the evening darkens. It is impossible I can stay many minutes longer!"

"What! give him all—all—for evermore—and deny me even these bitter moments which I see you are resolved shall leave no other taste behind. Ah, you are indeed heartless."

She looked down at him as she echoed his word in tones of bitter reproach, then suddenly—so suddenly that he was shocked into forgetting himself in alarm for her—she burst into tears; and in that moment of weakness and uncontrollable childlike passion of grief, she sobbed out his name, with so much tenderness, that the instant after she drew in her breath, and stood as if aghast at the revelation she felt she had made.

A secret thrill of joy ran through his veins—even beneath all the unquestionable agony and conflict of John Cunliff's soul—and shook his whole frame. But with the lover's instinctive cunning, which is never more true, inventive, or daring, than when love is in the highest state of spiritual exaltation, he remained silent, as if finding nought that he

desired in her passionate invocation. The trick was only too successful. As she saw him despondent at her feet, she could not but feel steal over her—in vivid succession—the remembrances of their first meeting, and the gradual and unsuspected growth of their attachment; favoured as it had been by the general habits of society, and of the people among whom they had been thrown.

And though it was no longer with secret delight she nourished her many remembrances of that time of illusion—though she had no longer pleasure or satisfaction in marking the almost daily processes of change—still, as Cunliff lay there, prostrate, and the consequences were brought home so vividly—she could not help letting her thoughts run back—even if it were only in wonder—or with the hope to draw some comfort out of them for him.

She saw how they had dallied with talk, which rarely failed to bring the blood into her cheek. How they had exchanged opinions, and always with the same result, that the opinions insensibly passed away and were forgotten, while leaving something behind too sweet and mysterious to be prudently looked

into. She remembered their few but coveted solitary walks together, where even the commonest acts of courtesy insensibly assumed a strange and attractive meaning ; their half-accidental, half-managed visits to the same country houses, or the same London drawing-rooms, at the same time ; where each of the hypocrites of love played the same well-acted part of glad surprise at the unexpectedness of the meeting—she from the woman's instinct of safety ; he to cover her design while feeling he thus strengthened the claims he might one day urge.

She saw all this now with changed eyes, and would have given some of the best drops of her heart's blood to wipe away from her soul the stains such a career left there.

But she saw, also, with almost a new sense, how strong and irresistible a love had grown up under those evil conditions. How her present scorn of the conditions, and of the miserableness of the whole array of temptations, proved the strength and reality of the love.

And so step by step she was driven back to look into herself—to note what a creature of

impulse she had been—what a plaything everyone had made of her from her earliest years—spoiled by her parents at home, her teachers at school, and most of all by her husband, who saw in her a beautiful idol, and treated it as if half of his own creation.

Then, again, when she had gone forth into society, what new and fascinating changes were rung on sweet-sounding bells to the same old theme, her gracious goodness in consenting simply to look and to be; when she became the especial pet of fashion; the favourite object of court by hosts and hostesses who wished to invest their dreary dinner-tables with a new charm; the day dream of young men for her beauty, talent, and fascination; who fluttered numerously about her and made her the constant centre of a most brilliant circle.

And had Catherine Rhys been no more than she thus saw in herself, her career would doubtless have been that of a thousand others—the career of a woman who has no inconvenient scruples against any kind of enjoyment—provided only all be done with due outward decorum and respectability.

Catherine had soon found herself to be quite another woman, when her strong though undeveloped passions and affections began to be called forth by a new influence. Looking back at herself, she seemed now for the first time to understand herself, and could not resist the fascination of collecting together, as into one focus, all the scattered traits under the new light. She had always been kind-hearted, but rarely thoughtful in her kindness; pure in feeling and desire, but with no fixed basis of religious or moral principle; worthy of admiration for her many real and charming qualities, but spoiling all by the practical habit of dissociating cause and effect, and demanding worship for herself, whatever that self might choose to be, in any moods, however wilful and fantastic.

And if all these things are changed, and for the better, how can the heart of the woman but acknowledge the author of the change? How refuse to him what he asks, as his sole repayment? She turns her brimming eyes full upon him, takes his hand, kisses it, and then says to him—

“Did you not know in fact, beyond all

possibility of honest denial on my part, the true state of things with me, no power should now draw it from me."

"No!" she added, with uplifted eyes, and with the smile of a martyr at the stake, at the moment she feels she is about to triumph and make the eager soul resist and keep down the shrinking and coward body, with a smile like this on her face, even while the big drops were falling heavily on his hand, "No—God, who sees into my heart, may best judge me—but I think I could keep my secret in spite of you, John Cunliff, had I any secret the keeping of which was humanly possible. But as it is not—I can but own to you that I am not ungrateful; that if I am in any way less frivolous than I was, less heartless, less inclined to see all creation as a kind of magnified image of myself, but rather to ask why, amid so sad and yet so sweet a world, where there is so much good to be done, why I, so pitiful and useless a being, exist—it is to you I owe the change. Aye, wonderful as it may sound, it is you who would have led me away from God, who have carried me, and are now carrying me nearer to him! Dear friend, if

you wish then to hear the truth—which can only shame me by its existence, not by its declaration—I will no longer deny you the poor satisfaction.”

“ You love me ? ”

“ I do.”

For a time, that seemed to both as if centuries of thought and feeling were sweeping over them, they were silent.

Then she spoke very softly.

“ Have I now satisfied you ? ”

“ I cannot thank you. I suppose you know that ? ”

“ You do thank me. I am sure you do. Well now, Cunliff, it is your part to be generous, manly, considerate. If our love be such as we have both, with unconscious flattery, perhaps, painted it, it is a love that will not allow you to attach ever more a breath of any kind of reproach or dishonour to my name. So also is it a love that will make me yearn not to see you, nor in any way, for a long time to come, to communicate with you,—No—no—hear me out !—but that will make me watch unceasingly, to learn of your good works, of your growing fame, of your recog-

nised power and influence among and over your fellow men."

"Dreams!" ejaculated Cunliff, and turned as if he would no longer even look upon her.

When he again turned, he was startled to see how unconscious he had been while she had risen and walked away homewards.

Swiftly he pursued and overtook her.

She, however, resolutely moved on toward the slope in front, which had to be ascended, and he was obliged to content himself with pouring out the last bitter flow of speech as he walked by her side.

"And is it possible that you can thus dismiss me to my fate? Can you see me return, perhaps, to the base life, from which only an angel could have drawn me? You are—you must be—the instrument of my salvation! Live for me—and I will be to you what man never yet was to woman. I feel I could write my name and yours so deeply in the world's heart, that they should never be forgotten. I am no philanthropist, yet I could, I think, under the inspiration of your ever present love, move the men of my time out of their ceaseless talk into serious action—for



the benefit of the reeking mass of miserable humanity that lies all about us. The beauty of such work would impel me on when the duty of it might seem too weak. But I need your eyes to refresh my dulled ones—if the sense of that beauty is to keep alive and be fruitful. Catherine, dearest, is there no hope for me beyond aught you have yet said? It is your love I need. With that I will play my part worthily before God and man.”

“That love shall be yours so far as I can in honour give it. Honour! God help me—for even His common words fail to express my sad state. But He will pity me, I think, if I act by the light given—and that light, dear friend, says,—I must go this way, and you that!”

She pointed as she spoke, first downwards towards Dola’ Hudol; and then to Dolgarrog, and the mountains behind it, through which lay the road to Cunliff’s own home.

They were now on the edge of the hill they had been ascending, and stood almost on a level with the dimly seen mountain tops, across the valley that lay below in misty distance, winding in large, grand undulations

from Criba Ban, on the left, to Snowdon on the right. Looking towards Snowdon, the valley appeared almost straight ; and down it as Cunliff turned his eyes that way, there came sailing through the sky where the golden haze of the sunset had left just a last suggestion of its warm radiance, a single heron—gaunt even at a distance—stately and steady in flight, unswerving and swift. With that unconscious superstition that in moments of great import makes trivialities become as the signs of fate, Rymer looked at the bird, and felt that if it continued coming straight down over the valley, and passed where they two were, as certainly must this bitterness pass his lips. As he stood and looked, Mrs. Rhys came close before him, holding out her hand, as if taking her final leave. He received it, but dropped it again ; and sat down on a bit of low broken wall beside her, his hat off, his hands clenched between his knees, his eyes on the patch of dark cloud sailing out of the faint but still golden distance.

As Mrs. Rhys looked at that white face, and that broad brow, where the lines seemed to have marked the minutes instead of the

years that had passed over it, there came a rush of warm, brave pity into her heart. A mother's comforting power and sweetness was in her touch and voice as she laid her hand on his shoulder and said—

“I should suffer more than I do if I did not know that with you things are better than with me. *My* existence! What can it be now at the best? Patience, endurance, success in hiding the only living thing in my heart. This is suffering! But with you it is all different. You have a comforter. Do you think I have not seen it? Call it the dream of your youth—your first ideal—what you will, I shall call it as Christ did, ‘the spirit of truth.’ You *have* seen truly; *I* never did till I knew you. You may again see truly. And oh, Cunliff, may these tears that dim your eyes at this parting be the falling of the mist that has blinded them so long. This very suffering itself should help you; for you know that for such minds as yours there is a rebound from deepest misery to highest and noblest bliss. And you will let this be so now? If you wish there to be one link between us still; if you would let some light and hope

into my dark life, you will let me hear this has been so with you."

He felt that she bent down towards him; he saw the lonely heron—his messenger of fate—coming steadily, swiftly, on through all the clear spiritual beauty of the evening sky, growing larger and more gaunt and sharp in outline.

It came—it passed. He cowered on the ruined wall.

Mrs. Rhys stooped and kissed his brow, but he did not stir, for he thought the kiss was not for him, but for that spirit within him, of which she had spoken, and in which he had no faith.

He knew then that she was going from him, but could not stir or speak; there was in the quiet, gentle step, as it receded, something that told him no gesture, no word could stop it.

But suddenly it did stop, and his heart seemed to stop beating at the same instant. Yet he did not dare to look up or to move.

The steps came hastening back, and he could but look up now with a certain fear, for

years that had passed over it, there came a rush of warm, brave pity into her heart. Her mother's comforting power and sweetness in her touch and voice as she laid her hand on his shoulder and said—

“I should suffer more than I do if I did not know that with you things are better than with me. *My* existence! What can be now at the best? Patience, endurance, success in hiding the only living thing in my heart. This is suffering! But with you it is all different. You have a comforter. Do you think I have not seen it? Call it the dream of your youth—your first ideal—what you will, I shall call it as Christ did, ‘the spirit of truth.’ You *have* seen truly; I never did till I knew you. You may again see truly. And oh, Cunliff, may these tears that dim your eyes at this parting be the falling of the mist that has blinded them so long. This very suffering itself should help you; for you know that for such minds as yours there is a rebound from deepest misery to highest and noblest bliss. And you will let this be so now? If you wish there to be one link between us still; if you would let some light and hope

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they were like those of a person running from danger.

The next instant Mrs. Rhys was clinging to his arm, trembling, panic stricken.

He looked beyond her for the cause of her alarm, and saw it slowly ascending the path through the firs—a grey figure, tall and courtly, a grave, long face, pale and bearded. He did not recognise it, but knew that she had done so. He needed to ask her no question, he needed only to think how to help her, as the great blue eyes and white trembling lips appealed to him with a child's helplessness—a woman's agony.

Selfish as he was, Cunliff at that moment would gladly have had the earth swallow him for her sake. For himself, and his own danger, in meeting the man who was approaching them, he cared little. But for her his very soul yearned to do the thing that was best. He conquered his own strong longing to let things so chance as to drive her to him for protection. He gave a quick, scrutinizing glance at the coming face, and saw that it was at present looking down. Was there hope still that he had not seen

them? No sooner did the thought come than he saw it was the one to act upon.

He looked at her, and said quickly, but decisively—

“He may not have seen me. You must meet him as if he had not. Have courage!”

His look and voice had complete command over her. Her cold hand was firm, even before it left his, with one tight, icy pressure.

“Have courage, dear life!”

“I have—I will have,” answered the white lips. “God bless you! Go—go quickly!”

And they parted, Cunliff going to the little wood, and Mrs. Rhys hurrying to the brow of the hill to meet her husband.

Cunliff could not, to save his soul, have kept out of earshot of that meeting. He could urge her on to save herself; but if it were too late, she should not stand alone to meet that man's rage. Whatever his interference might cost him, or her, interfere he would if he suspected danger.

So he crept along inside the firs, as she went with a sickly, miserable smile on her face down the path, up which the form he could not see was coming.



The firs now were too thick to allow him to see her, but he heard her footsteps, and his own kept pace with them. Soon he heard also the ascending footsteps, and wondered whether they were not more than usually measured and deliberate. Was *she* thinking so, poor soul, and trembling? he asked himself.

They have met—he has heard the footsteps stop.

“Dear Owen!” says the sweet, hysterical voice.

Cunliff can just see through the trees that her husband has taken both her hands and kissed her.

“You are looking very pale, darling—are you not well?”

The tone is rather politely kind than tenderly anxious or shocked. Is it natural to him, Cunliff wonders; or is it strangely unnatural, and filling her with alarm, as it fills him with alarm for her sake?

Then they turn and move on slowly together towards Dola’ Hudol, Mrs. Rhys murmuring some inaudible reply to her husband’s question; and Cunliff is left in wretched sus-

pense—suspense that is not to be passively endured—that makes it impossible for him to withstand following and watching the two figures. Gliding along in the shelter of the firs, he descends the hill with them; gliding on inside the rude road wall, he goes with them till they reach the carriage-gates of Dola' Hudol. But no movement of theirs shows him what he so much longs to know, and he is never near enough to overhear their words.

The great gates are open, and still remain open after the master and mistress have passed through them; but now he dare only follow them with his eyes up the broad, rising carriage drive. They stop at the little side door with the Tudor arch, and then he loses sight of them.

But he lingers about the place, watching the windows as the lights appear in them one by one, with a passionate dread that will not let him go—that drags back his feet when he takes some paces homewards.

The park trees are black, and the owls of Dola' Hudol are filling the sweet, still night air with their melancholy cries before he has forced himself to take his way back to Dol-

garrog, to his little close lodgings at the old Council House—to struggle there with his remorse and his miserable suspense as to Catherine's fate.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE HOME OF THE PEACEMAKER.

DAYLIGHT is spreading slowly down the long valley below Capel Illtyd, driving the clinging river mist before it. There is light enough for the miners as they cross the little bridge to see part of the Abbey ruins, even if another light did not fall redly upon them—the light of a turf fire burning in the great refectory, which is now the centre of a straggling farmhouse, hidden from the bridge by trees.

As the light streams from the hidden window, and flickers across the yard to the roofless chapel, with its nail-studded doors and mouldering jagged walls, there is such an air of stillness and solemnity about the place, one could half expect to see some monkish form among the shadows. Approaching the yard by the muddy little path beside the stream,

one perceives on the fresh breeze a slight odour of musty antiquity. The wooden stile by which the yard is entered is so rotten, great crumbling splinters can be picked from it ; and the moss on the wall is deep and rich with age.

The chief door of the farm-house is directly opposite the decaying doors of the old chapel. It is iron-plated and nail-studded, and opens right into the great refectory. The window is a little to the right, and shows this morning an interior worthy of Rembrandt.

The span roof of black oak, still in perfect preservation, seems to mock, by its grand proportions, the lowly fortunes of the family, gathered now round the wide chimney-place.

Two small tree-trunks are blazing there, giving out a pleasant, pungent smell ; giving out also a red light, that leaps to the rich black oak of the roof, and to the fair brown oak of the dressers and cupboards, which glow and deepen in colour as if blood was rising to their surface at its kiss.

Old-fashioned, polished chair legs throw their shadows on the grey, stone floor ; on

the homely blues and yellows of the dinner ware ; on the shelves, and the breakfast things on the little table by the fire ; and on the bright irons and brasses of the garden tools and cooking utensils, hung up indiscriminately in the chimney-place.

On one side of this chimney-place, which is all sooty shadow and vivid light, sit two great boys, squeezed together in one elbow chair, their whole attention centred in a little pipkin of milk, placed on the logs to boil. A shaggy little terrier, on a high stool beside them, fixes his greenish-brown eye on the same object, and with no less interest and watchfulness, perhaps with even a keener appetite. On the other side of the fire, with a baby of two months old on her lap, sits a girl in a black dress and square-bibbed apron. That is Nest, the curate's eldest daughter. Her fair, simple face and light hair, her blue eyes and wide laughing mouth look pretty in that dark old chimney, whatever they might look elsewhere.

Two tiny girls sit at the table, waiting for the milk, and comparing the fulness of their basins of cut bread ; and opposite these, with

a three-days-old "Times" in his hands, is Daniel Lloyd, the curate of Capel Iltyd.

His eldest girl sends anxious looks at him from time to time, for she sees that there has been some addition, since yesterday morning, to his many anxieties and troubles.

"What's the matter, Nest—another stray?" demands one of the boys, looking eagerly at Nest, as she rose in haste and went to the window, as if to look at the pigeons strutting on the ruins.

"I do believe, papa," cries Nest, in sudden animation, "there's Robert coming across the fields!"

"Robert!" cried the curate. "What!—not Robert Chamberlayne, surely?"

"Yes—it is him! He's waiting on the stile now; he can't get across for the sheep."

The curate rose, his face illumined with sudden warmth and gladness, and came to the door; while the boys rushed out delightedly, and Nest put off her nursing-apron.

The yard was crowded by an immense flock of sheep, which Chidlaw, the tenant of the abbey farm, and the curate's landlord, with an old shepherd, and two long-nosed dogs, were

trying to drive into the chapel ; whose ancient doors stood open, showing a roofless, grassy, little hall, which was often used to confine the sheep in while they were being marked.

The curate and his boys looked across the, as yet, impassable sea of wool, and saw Robert Chamberlayne sitting with one leg over the stile, looking down upon the sheep with lazy perplexity.

"What, can't you get across to us, Bob?" said Mr. Lloyd, laughing; "And, how are you, Bob? Well?"

"Yes; jolly enough, thank you, sir," shouted back Robert's voice, with the mellow ring of health in it.

"God bless him!" said the curate to himself; "he's just the same as ever." And he stood looking across at him with kindling eyes, feeling as if a bit of the brightest and healthiest of the outer world had come suddenly to his home in that handsome face of Robert's. The very sight of his fresh light clothes was pleasant to Daniel Lloyd, who was used to looking down on the same rows of coats Sunday after Sunday, and year after year.



The boys shouted out no end of information to him ; a little of which he heard, but the greater part of which was lost in the loud lamentations with which the whole place was distracted. He did not appear at all troubled at the delay, but sat comfortably with his cigar between his fingers—in amused patience—laughing across the noisy yard.

“So you haven’t had much of a harvest here?” he shouted.

“No,” answered the curate. “And how goes farming with you, Bob?”

“Splendidly,” roared Robert, half despairing of being heard above the increasing tumult.

But the curate did hear, and thought with a sigh of the failure of his own potato-crop.

“I don’t know how you manage to tear yourself away from it all just now, Bob. I hope it’s a good wind that blew you here, eh?”

“No ! confoundedly bad.”

“Ah?”

“Yes. Hollo ! the tide’s beginning to turn now.”

By fair or foul means Chidlaw had got one

of the sheep into the chapel, and the others began to awaken some fears in the minds of beholders as to whether they would not smother each other in their blundering haste to follow.

The latest stragglers nearly threw Robert down as he came across the yard.

"I can't act patience on *that* monument any longer," he said. "How are you, sir? I was at church yesterday and you did not recognise me."

There was a deep respect and affection in the manner of the young man, as he came up to him and grasped his hand, that moved the curate very much.

"No, Bob!" he said, "I shouldn't have known you. It is a long time since we met. I scarcely expected to see you again."

"Or wished, sir?" asked Robert.

"Ah, Bob; I often do that."

The young man held out his hand again, colouring with pleasure. They passed on into the refectory, Chamberlayne, by the way, pulling the ears of the boys; and greeting Mrs. Chidlaw, the curate's landlady, with a compliment that made her for some minutes

oblivious to everything around her. There was a touch of gentle reverence in his greeting to Nest, as she met him with a child in her arms and one at her skirts—looking, he thought, like one of the tender virgin mothers of the old pictures—fair, and sweet, and placid. Her black dress, and the black frocks of the little girls, reminded him how one kind face that had always grown kinder at his coming, was no longer there to meet him. The remembrance put a sudden quietness and constraint upon him, which lasted all the while he was drinking the coffee Nest made for him ; and when at last the curate took him into the study, the boys were both agreed that Bob was not nearly so jolly as he used to be, and went out together to discuss the fact with Chidlaw.

The curate had winced a little when Robert asked if he would go with him into the study, for it was a spot to which the gentle care of Nest had not penetrated since her mother's death. The window-plants, which the still hands now crossed over the still heart, had tended so lovingly for the sake of him who worked here, were dead and dry ; and the

very walls of the room seemed to weep for her ; for the damp she used to keep from it by her skilful care, now oozed through the bright papers and discoloured the low ceiling.

Daniel Lloyd did not trust himself to look round, but waited at the door till Robert came in, and then sat down and kept his eyes upon his face.

" I thought there must be something the matter, Bob," he said, " at least I was half afraid there was—by your coming here before you went to Bod Elian. Sit down, my boy, and tell me all about it."

Robert knew the room well, for it was here he used to pore over lessons during the three years he was the curate's pupil, and he was at once conscious of an indescribable dreariness about it he never noticed before.

" Yes," he said, " it's the most confounded sort of business I ever had to deal with in all my life before ; and, if it were not so terrible to Elias Morgan, would be the most absurd !"

" Elias Morgan !" echoed the curate, with a look in his eye that rapidly changed from

wonder to sudden enlightenment, and then to deep concern. Robert went on :—

“Let me see. I’ve got the lawyer’s letter somewhere. Oh, here it is ! Read that, and you’ll know the best, or rather the worst, part of the business.”

In silence Mr. Lloyd took the letter, went to the window, and there read it slowly and carefully. After that, he did not need to ask many questions in order to learn the true character of the calamity impending over his neighbour, and of his pupil’s unfortunate share in bringing it about.

“Poor things !” he said, “the blow will be very terrible !” Then, seeing the pain on Chamberlayne’s face, he added, “My dear boy, I really feel for you.”

Robert sat down on the broad window-seat, saying—

“I’m as wretched about it as a fellow well can be !”

“Elias is my neighbour,” said the curate, “though he hasn’t spoken to me of late. For many, many years, we have trodden the same ground ; our footsteps have perpetually crossed ; yet he keeps himself now more rigidly aloof

than ever, as if he thought it not merely impossible for two men to lead by different roads to the same God, but that my road must be to a very bad end indeed ! Yet I can but feel for him—I can but feel for him ! He is a proud, austere man ; he'll think that the scorn of his neighbours will be turned upon him. The blow will, indeed, be awful to him ! The poor children, too ! Yes, yes ; it's a sad business altogether ! Bob," he said presently, " I'll go up with you to break this to Elias. At the worst, he can but turn me out of the house ; and if he did that, I should be tasting a little of his humiliation, which will do me more good than sitting here thinking of him."

" I was going to beg you to do so, sir ?" said Robert wonderfully relieved, " but I was half-ashamed to show you how cowardly I feel about it altogether. You see, it makes it so much worse, my cousin being what he is. He's not one to let the blow be softened for him a bit. I know he wouldn't take a penny from me to save himself from starving."

" Well, Bob ; I have a letter to write, and one or two things I must see to before I can be ready to go with you to Bod Elian. There

are the boys wild to be at you, I know. You must give them a few minutes, and remember the accumulation of gossip Nest has for you."

So Robert went back to the refectory, and had just seated himself comfortably opposite Nest, with his favourite little Margaret on his knee, when the curate called him back.

"I want to ask you a question, Bob;" he said, "and mind you're quite at liberty to decline answering it if you like to do so. It's about your cousin Hirell!"

Robert coloured, and looked with an air of deep interest at a cart lumbering past the window.

"You have changed your mind; you have given up all these old fancies, possibly?" asked Mr. Lloyd.

"No, sir!"

"May I ask, then, Robert (and mind you needn't answer if you'd rather not), may I ask how you think this change will affect you with regard to her?"

"I think it will play the deuce with me altogether, with regard to Elias, and everybody belonging to him," answered Robert, gloomily.

"You think it would not be right to her to say anything under these circumstances?"

"I'm afraid," said Robert, "she would think I wanted to take advantage of their difficulties."

"I think so too, Bob," said the curate rising, "and this is what I want to say to you,—if you *do* think of speaking to Hirell, do so *before* they know of this. Now go and talk to Nest."



## CHAPTER XII.

### BOD ELIAN.

BOD ELIAN (the abode or dwelling of Elias, an ancestor of the Morgans, from whom the house was named in the days of its prosperity), lay up the mountains on the right of the Capel Illtyd road.

Daniel Lloyd and Chamberlayne ascended a path through a thick wood, so thick that in spite of the rains of yesterday, the ground they trod was almost dry, and crumbled under their feet.

This led them to the foot of another hill, one far more rugged and steep, where the wind blew fiercely, and the wild hungry-looking sheep tore great patches off their coats, and lamed themselves in getting to the little bits of storm-blackened vegetation on which they fed with almost wolfish voracity ; look-

ing up, some with half-threatening, others with pleading and pathetic faces, at the intruders crossing their wretched pasture.

"I know the poor fellow who rents these fields," said Daniel Lloyd; "his own food is as scant as that of his sheep."

"Why doesn't he come to Kent?" said Chamberlayne.

The other smiled without answering; and they went on till they had left the sheep far below, tearing at the half-bald hill-side, like ravenous children at the breast of a mother dead of famine.

And now the hill, as they continued to ascend, became more barren, and seemed leading to a region utterly destitute of all life and beauty, till suddenly there appeared before them, on the hill's summit, a fringe of foliage against the sky.

"I think," said Chamberlayne, "I know where we are."

"Yes," answered Lloyd, "that is the garden of Bod Elian."

The very word "garden" seemed strangely out of place. The garden of Bod Elian, looking at it from where they stood, far below it,

had an ethereal, unreal aspect : its trees might have been but fringes of the dusky cloud that hung over them, and seemed mimicking their shapes. The path did not lead them to this, but curved round the hill till they came to a spot where they could see the house of which they were in search, and where they had the garden below them on the right.

They were now descending a green sloping field, in which sheep and a few cows were grazing. Below this was another field, level and brown ; and therein, with the garden trees on its right, and a wet heavily rutted road leading to it from the left, stood Bod Elian.

It was even more austere simple than the Dolgarrog houses, as if its builder had had in his mind the thought, "I want a house to shelter me from rain, and storms, and sun, and nothing more ;" and had said to all manner of comfort and beauty as Thomas a'Kempis would have a true Christian say to happiness, "I can do without thee."

It stood alone, detached from the garden trees ; and the sun, shining on its flat, dark face, took from it none of its coldness and solemnity. Some of the windows were open,

but no snowy curtain-end or blind flapped in the breeze : windows were dark ; no brightness from within welcomed the brightness without. And the sunshine lay on the house-front, like a smile on a dead, stiff face.

As they came upon the road leading directly to it, Mr. Lloyd suddenly stood still ; and Chamberlayne, looking at him inquiringly, saw a gleam of kindly emotion in his clear grey eyes. He looked in the direction of their gaze ; and beheld, in the distance, on the slope of a stony field, Elias Morgan's new chapel ; the roof just finished ; a flag flying merrily in the morning breeze.

Robert examined it with his Tourist glass. There was no creature near, except a dog asleep upon some clothes of the workmen, who had probably gone to dinner. There was such an air of stillness around it as seemed to belong to a ruin rather than to a new building ; and almost as a ruin the two visitors to Bod Elian, knowing what they did of its builder's fortunes, regarded it. It was a simple building—so small and humble that John the Baptist might have raised it in the wilderness, and preached there in his garment of camel's hair.

The two stood gazing at it silently.

"And this was his great ambition," said Chamberlayne, deeply moved; "this is what we must show him to be his castle in the air."

Daniel Lloyd did not make any reply as they turned towards Bod Elian. He was the curate of Capel Iltyd, and his feelings concerning this chapel were necessarily of more mixed a nature than Chamberlayne's. The bit of hardy colour on his cheek grew deeper as they approached the house.

"I confess to you," he said to Chamberlayne, "I feel anything but sure that my interference will be welcome to Elias."

"Oh, Mr. Lloyd, but what is it to me?" cried Chamberlayne earnestly, "I am more of a coward every step I take. Look at that flag; fancy them all going out to see it hoisted this morning; there's the new red waggon Hughes was speaking of, I suppose; and what's this? Oh, the two new rooms, see, built out at that end. By Jove!"

He slashed at the grass and weeds by the road with his stick, as if each thing he had mentioned had increased his indignation against himself and his unwelcome news.

"I am no longer in doubt, sir," he said, suddenly turning to the curate and speaking in a low voice, "as to what we were talking about. I will try and see Hirell, if you will talk with Elias a little while before he is told."

"There's some one in the Hall?" remarked Mr. Lloyd.

"It is Hirell!" said Chamberlayne, slashing away at the weeds harder than ever.

The ground was sodden, and their footsteps fell noiselessly upon it, so that they approached the door without being perceived by two persons just inside it.

These were Hirell and Kezia Williams. One side of the hall was crowded with large packages, and by one of them knelt Hirell, drawing aside the cover to peep at the velvet cushion of the arm-chair it enclosed. Kezia was feeding some linnets in a long cage, and listening with a gentle flutter to Hirell's exclamations of delight. Though she spoke in Welsh, Chamberlayne knew the meaning of the girl's joyous tones too well; and concealed pity gave his own voice and manner a deeper seriousness and gentleness, than he

had meant it to show, as he entered the door, meeting her face to face, and calling her by name :—

“ Hirell !”

“ Robert !”

And then he was holding her hand, listening, without understanding, as she spoke apologetically of her coolness yesterday.

Hirell's mode of speech was peculiar. She was frequently seized by hesitation, almost painfully apparent in her face and manner, but she never allowed herself to go on speaking while this lasted. She would be suddenly silent and confused in the middle of a sentence sometimes, but during that silence, and while the listener pitied her, would recover herself, and then she would continue her speech with a grace and firmness, a sweet dignity of voice and look, that at times was noble.

“ Nay, be not afraid for your child, my friend,” the old minister, Ephraim Jones, had once said, in reply to some tenderly expressed misgivings of Elias ; “ her very voice speaks within her like the ringing of a bell that is sound.”

Robert Chamberlayne could hardly realise what it was, whether voice, eyes, old memories or new hopes, that charmed him so as to deprive him almost of the power of speech as Hirell spoke. He only knew that some strange spell was over him.

"I am so glad to see you, Robert," said Hirell, "Hugh was afraid you would think we were not pleased to see you yesterday; but we were indeed—all of us were—but—"

She stopped as she noticed Daniel Lloyd talking to Kezia, and moved to him slightly, then went on speaking with quiet, genial confidence.

"You find us just at the beginning of a great change. But you knew. And have you thought about us—did you fancy how all would be altered here?"

"Well—yes—I supposed it would alter things for you," answered Robert with a desperate effort.

"Father," said Hirell, "is in the new parlour with Hugh. He is writing a letter to the master of the college where Hugh is going; and some other letters to friends he once knew in London, and who have been



very kind in their congratulations on this change."

"Oh!" said Robert, his gaze straying from the sweet direct eyes to the little fingers playing with a gold chain, the only bit of yesterday's finery that Hirell wore this morning. "Then your father is engaged just now?"

"Yes, but not for many minutes, for he is expecting company. Mr. Ephraim Jones, the minister you saw us with yesterday, is coming to see the chapel, and to have prayers for Hugh. Kezia, won't you bring Mr. Lloyd in?"

She led the way as she spoke towards the *old* parlour, which Robert remembered well enough.

Mr. Lloyd did not follow them, but stood in the hall, talking with Kezia about certain poor people, to whose houses they both were in the habit of going on the same errand.

It was a damp, faded, common-place room into which Robert followed Hirell. The window was shut because Hirell's dresses were lying here. The table was covered with pieces of silk, and near it stood two chairs in

which Hirell and Kezia had sat at work till the arrival of the new furniture.

Every bright ribbon and shining fold of silk added to the disturbance of Robert's mind. Presently Hirell said—

“I am to go to London for a little while, and one must do as other people, you know.”

As she sat down and carelessly took her work in her hand, Robert dropped into Kezia's chair on the other side of the little round table, and watched her nervously, feeling as if every stitch she set were a fresh knot for him to undo in this tangled web.

He looked at Hirell as she sat and stitched ; and her hand, like a soft little bird held captive by a string, flew to and fro from her work ; he looked at her, and all his honest wish was in his eyes.

Hirell felt his gaze on her face, and drew from it the knowledge that Robert found her much changed from what she had been when they were together last ; and she knew well that the change was not for the worse, but was one of the many delights which were just now being showered upon her. She was beautiful ; the knowledge was not new to her

but it came with exquisite freshness from Robert's honest eyes. She bent her head and trembled, for she knew that her childish joy had risen in soft blushes to the face, and in tears to her eyes.

"Will you forgive me, Hirell, if I ask you a question that may make you very angry with me?"

Robert's voice trembled; his arms were on the table flattening the crisp silk, and Hirell knew that he was looking upon her with very bright and eager glances. She vaguely supposed it was one of the old silly gallant speeches he was about to make, and tried to overcome her confusion, and smile as she said :

"If your question makes me angry, Robert, I promise to forgive you; and if it does not, as I don't believe it will do, there is no forgiveness needful, I suppose?"

"No, I suppose not—not in that case; but I'm afraid it won't be so. I'm afraid it will make you angry, Hirell. I shouldn't ask it just now, not till we had seen more of each other, after such a long separation; but I have no choice as to time. I must go away

to-morrow unless——well I want to ask you, Hirell, if you remember—if you ever think with any pleasure of the old days when I was here, when we spent so much time together?"

Hirell could not quite see why so much earnestness need have been put into the question. It was one which she had often thought she should like to ask Robert; and now he had asked her, but not exactly as she would have asked it of him. She was puzzled, but on the whole pleased that he should think so seriously of a time which was very dear to her.

"Yes, Robert," she answered, "I have a great delight in thinking of that time."

"And do you ever wish it back, Hirell, as I do?"

Hirell paused in her work, resting an elbow in the palm of one hand, and her chin in the other, looking dreamily, without one pang of regret, on the silk that Robert was crushing.

"Do you?" she said in a soft, wondering tone, "do you wish it back, Robert? I don't—I can't—sweet as it was. I can't wish it back. As one gets older, one sees so many things coming so much more wonderful and

happy than anything one has known before ! But don't think me ungrateful, Robert, or changeful," she said more earnestly, looking up at him and smiling. "I would not have that time cut out of my life for the world. It was like what nothing else will ever be again. I remember it as one in a rich orchard full of ripening fruit remembers the blossoms—they are lovely to remember ; but one would not wish to have them back instead of the fruit."

"No, that stands to reason," said Robert, bluntly and sadly—"and I don't know that I mean I should care for the old state of things altogether. I'm too lazy now to satisfy Mr. Lloyd's idea of a morning's work ; and—but that's nothing to do with it, Hirell, it isn't the time I want back—it is my old friend of those days, Hirell—it is you !"

Hirell's hands fell in her lap, her cheeks turned pale, and her eyes, as she raised them to Robert's face, had a chilled blank look in them.

"Robert," she said, "I suppose I know what you mean."

"I mean, will you be my wife, Hirell, as you promised me when you were a little girl,

and my dearest friend, though not half as dear as you are now?"

Hirell sat silent. She felt cold and choking. All her bright life seemed threatened by sudden dulness and monotony. She felt like a child who, hastening gladly to some gay feast, is asked to turn away with a dry crust. What marry Robert—honest, common-place Robert Chamberlayne—for so she could not but look upon him, without stopping to ask as to the justice of the opinion) and live all her life long in his boasted county, crammed so full of corn and hops, or, as Hirell looked at it, of bread and beer, that one could scarcely breathe!

Was this the thing for which she was asked to give up all the new delicious dreams that were enchanting her life, day and night.

She looked at Robert's large hands thrown half-clasped across the table in his eager, hearty earnestness, and rising, laid her own hand, cold and trembling, on them.

"Robert, you asked me to forgive you if your question should be one to cause me pain."

"Was it then, Hirell?"

"Yes," answered Hirell, selfish in her intense desire to throw off the chill weight his words had laid on her heart. "I wonder you should have asked it, Robert. But never mind; whatever pain it has given me, I forgive freely."

"Thank you," said Robert, taking her extended hand, and looking in her face with a deep regret. She would not have been flattered had she known what an unselfish regret it was; how much he was thinking of *her* loss by her refusal, and how little of his own. His evident pain as he clasped her hand, and looked at her, gave her much trouble.

"I wish," she said, with tears, "I could forgive myself as easily for causing you disappointment, Robert."

"Now, don't you think of that," cried Robert, with sudden relief and heartiness; "don't you, for a moment, think of that, Hirell. I shan't hurt; I mean I shall throw it right off, and forget it in very little time. Before I've been back a month, you shall hear of me being as jolly as ever. Don't you have a grain of uneasiness about me. Now promise me you won't."

And holding her hand in one of his, he laid his other on her slight shoulder, and looked in her face with a smile that seemed so simply bright and genial, that Hirell could but smile too at her own fears concerning Robert's heart-wound, as she answered with perfect sincerity, and with the slightest touch of contempt at his utter want of romance—

“No, I won't be uneasy about you, Robert. I don't think there is much cause of uneasiness.”

“Not the slightest ; and now let's forget it. I shall go and speak to Kezia, or we shall have Mr. Lloyd converting her.”

As he passed out of the door a dog came in, and he turned his head a little to look after it, remembering it as an old acquaintance ; and Hirell, whose eyes were following him, saw that his face was full of trouble—so full as to make her feel for the moment she had hardly understood him. In spite of all that he had said then, he was suffering, she thought—even a nature like his was not to be easily read.

But she soon forgot him ; for her pale-blue silk, the most beautiful of all her dresses, at



which Kezia and herself had worked so hard, was now finished ; and Hirell stole up to her own room to try it on, intending to come down in it and dazzle Hugh and her father—both of whom enjoyed such pretty surprises of Hirell's after her own manner.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ELIAS MORGAN'S FEAST.

IN honour of the expected guest, the Reverend Ephraim Jones, an unusually bountiful repast was being prepared in the kitchen of Bod Elian.

Before the two new parlours were built, the kitchen was the principal room in the house. It was a large long-shaped room, with low ceiling, and smoke-blackened beams, thick set with iron hooks, on which almost every suspendable thing in the kitchen was hung. There were old market-baskets, hams, and flitches of bacon, jugs, hats, kettles, horse-collars, and old sets of harness; strings of onions, bags of seeds, bunches of dried herbs, and coils of stocking yarn. But to-day the beam hooks were crowded beyond their wont by the provisions for the great chapel feast

which was to be given by Elias to-morrow to all the members of the Dolgarrog chapel. Large joints of butcher's meat, a rare sight in Bod Elian, kept the noses and tongues of the three farm dogs in a state of perpetual unrest, as they prowled about the kitchen in spite of Kezia's gentle scoldings, and the vigorous flappings of the rough servant-girl's apron. The morning sun shone on nets of rich russet apples, that had plainly never ripened in the windy little orchard on the hill behind ; and the dresser was crowded with parcels of grocery, and cakes, and sweetmeats. Hampers half-unpacked stood about, bewildering Kezia, as she moved gently to and fro over her work.

Robert Chamberlayne found her here, frying "lightcake," as she called some heavy preparation of batter, very popular in her country. Mr. Lloyd sat near the fire, chatting to her about the domestic affairs of the farm. He looked at Robert with a kindly anxiety. The young man laid his hand lightly on the curate's shoulder, and as Kezia was bending over her cooking, said in a low voice,

"We were both mistaken, sir," then Mr.

Lloyd looked up into his eyes more scrutinisingly, and Robert nodded and smiled, and the curate nodded, as if saying he understood, but did not smile ; and then Robert went to the other side of the fire, averted his face, and they both sat as if quietly watching Kezia's cooking.

Kezia Williams, Elias Morgan's house-keeper, was a soft-eyed fair-haired woman, about twenty-three, but seeming older ; for her manners were peculiarly grave, and her face wore a look of peaceful wisdom, as if she had seen through all the great mysteries of life, and would never let herself be disturbed by a single worldly hope or fear. Her soft grey eyes had a kind of sympathy in them for the griefs of others, however trivial ; and her placid lips a dreamy smile for all who smiled at her ; but she did not allow her thoughts to dwell on the bitter sufferings of the world ; she kept her meek eyes on her own narrow path, and followed it with patient cheerfulness, thankful that she had just light to see it.

"Elias is still engaged, then ?" Robert said to Kezia.

"He is, Master Robert," she answered. "And I was saying to Mr. Lloyd, I hope you will not think us rude not telling of your being here ; but he wished not to be disturbed while writing this letter for Hugh."

The tone in which Kezia said "he wished" expressed as much respect for the injunction as if it had been a command.

Chamberlayne showed no more signs of impatience, but sat watching Kezia as gravely as if she had been preparing a funeral feast.

While his eyes were resting on a basket of new spoons and forks, engraved with Elias Morgan's initials, Kezia pointed out to him an object he had not yet noticed.

It stood at one end of the room, the furthest from the wide old chimney, wrapt carefully from dust and smoke, and for the last hour Kezia's eyes had kept turning towards it with a tender pleasure. It was a present which Elias intended for his young brother, and of which Hugh as yet knew nothing ; for it had arrived while he was out, and had been concealed in Kezia's own room till this occasion, on which it was to be presented to him.

It was a new harp, and its purchase was,

next to the building of the little chapel, the greatest extravagance of which Elias had been guilty.

The old one, which had been in the family many years, had, under the young man's touch, been the source of the only pleasure the grave elder brother allowed himself to enjoy. And his enjoyment of Hugh's music had been deep ; so deep and exquisite, that he no sooner possessed the means than he felt he must give expression to it ; and he chose to do so by this gift, " which," said Elias to Kezia, " will thank him in language he best understands."

There it stood, and Kezia pointed it out to Robert, and related its story ; and he looked at it gravely enough.

Yes, there it stood, veiled music, like their future, which when they came with joyous impatient hands to try it, was to startle them with its mournfulness.

The long deal table was spread ; and Kezia laid out the bright new plate, and ranged her dainties on the shelf before the open window, through which they could just see the new chapel with its merry flag, and the workmen,

who had returned to their tasks and were making Moel Mawr (the great mountain) faintly echo with their sawing and hammering. Seeing all this, Kezia smiled and brightened with a gentle excitement, that brought a faint rose on her cheek, and gave new light to her eyes.

Robert had assisted her to draw up the heavy, stiff-backed oak chairs to the table, and to bring in benches and stools so as to make up the necessary number of seats, when they heard, at last, a door opened, and the feet of Elias and Hugh approaching.

They came in together. Elias held the letters he had been writing in his hand. Both brothers had on their faces a tender gravity which seemed to speak of but lately subdued emotion, and gave them for a moment a faint likeness to each other, though Hugh was thin and slight, and had a small oval face and brown eyes like Hirell's.

As they came in at the door, Elias resting his hand in his old way on Hugh's shoulder, there was a touching contrast in the expressions of the two faces ; in the lingering anxiety of the elder brother's as his eyes rested on Hugh with a deep fatherly love, and the bright

furtive self-confidence that lay behind the respectful attention in Hugh's downcast look. It was sad wisdom and happy ignorance, loving, but doubting, each other.

Kezia had placed a clothes-horse before the harp, that it might not be seen by Hugh till the moment Elias should think fit to present his gift.

"See, Elias," said she, going to meet them as they entered, "here is Robert Chamberlayne come, and Mr. Lloyd with him; they have been waiting for you nearly an hour."

While Hugh and Robert shook hands, the keen grey eyes of Elias rested on the curate's face inquiringly. He had a few secret grievances against him. A member of his chapel had been drawn away to become one of Mr. Lloyd's congregation; one of his labourers had been made drunk at the fair by a ploughman of the Abbey-farm; and, worse than all, to Elias' certain knowledge, Mr. Lloyd had not only allowed some English tourists to visit the Abbey ruins on the Sabbath day, but had actually conducted them himself, and given them all the information he could.

Elias could not look into the curate's face without seeing these three transgressions



written plainly upon it, and his gaze was at first severe and repelling. But on different parts of the curate's apparel was traced in certain hieroglyphics—such as a darn in the white necktie ; a chalkiness round the button-holes of his coat ; a patch on the toe of his boot—a word which had far more effect on Elias Morgan's heart than all the curate's crimes put together.

Poverty—yes. *He* was still poor ; always to be poor. *His* children—*his* home—*his* heart knew none of the sunshine that was flooding Bod Elian, where everyone moved about in a sort of delicious blindness—where Elias himself at times could only think calmly when he darkened his eyes to pray.

They approached each other. Daniel Lloyd's face was very sad. Elias, little dreaming it was the shadow of his own calamity that made it so, bowed himself before the superior dignity which, it seemed to him, sadness and poverty gave even to his misguided and much-erring neighbour.

The obstinate, rigid head, so unaccustomed to bend before any save One, bowed stiffly as he held out his hand.

"You do me an honour, sir," said Elias.  
"I thank you for this visit."

Mr. Lloyd had been prepared for coldness—suspicion; for anything but being received by Elias warmly and humbly, and his voice was not quite steady as he said—

"And I am grieved—grieved more than I can express, to tell you my visit is a very sad one."

Hugh, who was standing by Robert, turned hastily, his attention arrested by something in Mr. Lloyd's voice.

Elias, whose perceptions were not so quick, thought the curate was alluding to some trouble of his own, and was beginning to be filled by a new hope and pleasure. Had Lloyd come to him for help? Would he let him help him? If so, how could he do it most humbly, most effectually? How could he anticipate what his neighbour was going to say, and spare him the anguish and humiliation of saying it?

Hugh's eyes had seen in their hurried, searching gaze at the curate's face that something was wrong, and they flashed back to Robert questioningly. Robert's lip was un-

steady ; he bit it, and moved his hand vaguely towards Mr. Lloyd, which was all the answer he could give to Hugh's silent question.

Then, as Elias stood praying in his heart for light to see his neighbour's need, he was startled by hearing Hugh cry out behind him—

“Mr. Lloyd, for God's sake speak at once ! Something is the matter ! What is it ?”

Elias looked round bewildered, but sternly reproachful at Hugh's use of that holy name.

Daniel Lloyd was about to ask to speak with him alone, but seeing that Kezia had left the kitchen, and no one was there but Elias, Hugh, and Robert, he saw no good in further delay. The blow which he had to give seemed as if it would take all the strength out of him—he looked about for a chair.

Robert came round and gave him one. He sat down while Elias stood before him—his face grim with sudden foreboding, his form rigid as a rock.

“Morgan,” said the curate, “I think I can understand now, for the first time, why I have always had a sort of wish to shun you.

I believe it was because Satan warned me that if I became intimate with you, I should have presented to me finer and harder lessons than I should care to learn. But now I am so placed by the hand of the Allwise, as to be obliged to come here to learn of you such a lesson as I speak of. And this is what I have come to learn: If a man, after a life of poverty—and depression, and sadness, through poverty—is made rich in all that he desires for himself and those dearest to him; and if, just while the joy of his good fortune is at its height, he is called upon by God to resign all, suddenly and completely, how should he bear himself under this blow? Elias Morgan, *you* are to teach us this lesson. God requires it at your hands. He wills that you should teach it to all within your house—to your young brother Hugh, to your child Hirell, to your faithful servant Kezia, and to all here who have been glad with you in your prosperity, and must suffer by your loss.”

Elias remained still, his eyes cold and hard-looking as flint, fastened on the curate's face.

Hugh had thrown himself into a chair, and

was sitting with his arms on the back, and his head bowed down on his arms.

Then Robert Chamberlayne came to take his part in explaining, and Elias turned his flinty eyes slowly from Lloyd's face to his cousin's.

"Morgan," said the young man, "I take great blame to myself for writing you that letter. Till last Wednesday I thought nothing, not the Bank of England itself, safer than our shares in this affair."

An almost lion-like glare came into Morgan's eye as it scanned Robert's flushed and troubled face. He stood still; his chest heaved. He said with manifest effort, and in a voice that made even Hugh start, stricken as he was—

"Had I been *you*, Robert Chamberlayne, I had rather have cut off my right hand than have done this thing. Facts! Facts!" he almost wailed in his strong voice. "I asked you for them before and you gave me—opinions—it seems. Tell me the truth now; the whole truth, though it be more bitter than gall, and sharper than a sword."

"This is the whole truth, Morgan," said

Robert. "The firm is ruined; they paid us a year's profit to deceive us, as they wanted to keep all quiet to get another partner in. I never knew a word of it till Wednesday, when I was asked to a meeting of creditors. Here is my lawyer's letter, which tells all."

Elias took the letter, and read it through with the same strange glare in his eye, a glare of wrath—of wrath at the world's crookedness which had brought this thing to pass. When he had read the letter he gave it back to Robert.

There was silence then for a minute; neither Robert nor the curate feeling fit to cope with the difficulty.

A bitter sob from Hugh stirred him at last. He half turned his head towards him.

"They will all want comfort from you, Elias," said Daniel Lloyd, gently.

Elias looked round at him.

"Comfort!" he repeated, grimly. "No, sir, my family will expect of me that I do my duty. *You* come to see how I do it in this sore strait. *You shall* see; you shall see me do it according to my light—according to my light."

The light was a narrow one, but intense. First of all it showed him the well-filled table where the new plate was shining.

“Kezia!”

She had just come into the room, and was standing like one petrified, as she looked at Elias.

He stood at the head of the table, and motioned with his hand as he said sternly—

“Gather these up; pack them as they were before. They go back; they are not mine.”

“Elias?” cried Kezia. “Mr. Lloyd; oh, mercy! what is the matter?”

“Obey me!” shouted Morgan.

The letters which he had written for Hugh to take with him to London lay on the table close to his hand. His eye fell on these next. He took them up quietly and tore each in two, and dropped both to the ground.

Just then a soft rustle of silk drew his eyes to the door, and in a moment Hirell entered, coming quickly, conscious of having loitered over her new dress. She noticed nothing strange at first, for she was full of

tender expectancy of the surprise and pleasure of her father and Hugh.

They all watched her approach, and trembled for her at the cruel severity of the voice that went to meet her and arrest her step.

"Hirell!"

She stood still; her colour went, and she turned her soft startled eyes from one to another; then they returned to her father's face with a look of great fear and trouble.

It did not soften the indomitable sternness of that face—only a sharp spasmodic quiver passed over it, as Elias stretched out his arm, and pointed to her dress.

"Take it off!" he cried; "go, take it off!—and these gauds," touching her necklace with a cold trembling finger—"off with them. Kezia, take them off!"

Kezia, with her usual prompt obedience, came in timid haste, unclasped the necklace, and laid it on the table before her master.

He looked from it to a large trunk that stood by the wall, partly packed, ready for Hirell's visit to London.

"Go with her," he said to Kezia, pointing to Hirell; "and take off that gown, and



bring it here, and all her other finery and your own ; all that has been bought with this money."

Hirell, in her great perplexity and terror, allowed Kezia to lead her away, and as they went Elias turned upon Hugh.

"Brother ! if I am not to have help from you, let me have at least obedience. If you must grieve as a child, obey like a child. Those clothes that you had made at Dolgarrog, put them up—all of them. Give me that watch."

Hugh roused himself, and threw the watch on the table by Hirell's necklace.

"That pin in your handkerchief."

While Hugh was taking it out, a heavy marching tread was heard along the passage—a form stood in the doorway, and all but Mr. Lloyd recognised the burly figure, and strongly - blotched face of the Calvinist preacher, the Reverend Ephraim Jones.

"Well, friend Elias," he cried, in his loud hoarse voice, wiping the moisture from his face. "Here you are, feasting like Job among his brethren, when the days of his trouble were passed. Well, shall I, like

them, condole with you over the evils that are gone, or rejoice with you for the peace and plenty that have been showered on your house?"

Elias looked at him, his clenched hand on the table—his nostrils distended.

"Do neither, friend Ephraim," he answered, in a voice of hard, calm agony. "Since you are come, assist me to set my house in order; for God hath commanded that Mammon shall depart from it; and I am sorely tasked in destroying his idols, and tearing his bonds from the hearts of my children."

Robert Chamberlayne seeing the minister stand amazed, went to him, and told him the truth, entreating him to prevail upon Elias to deal more gently with Hirell and Hugh.

As he was speaking with him, Hirell and Kezia entered, pale and trembling. Their arms were full of things, with which they timidly approached Elias.

Hirell wore one of the very oldest and poorest of the dresses that were hers before the sudden change from poverty; for all the better ones had been given away by herself or Kezia to the poor. It was a dingy blue

print, with white spots, made loose and fastened with a coarse cord girdle. She had only been used to wearing it for milking in on wet mornings, and on churning days, and had seldom sat down to any meal in it in the presence of her father and Hugh. Having now to come into the presence of so many in it, seemed to her to add greatly to the strange and sudden humiliation that had fallen upon the house. She had resisted, but Kezia in her great fear of Elias had been strong, and had forced her to do his will. Her white, stricken, terrified face, as she crept in at Kezia's side, with her beautiful dress in her arms, touched Robert more than all her joyousness had done. His heart ached for her as she stood waiting for, but trembling to meet her father's look.

That look came upon her and Kezia, and on their gay load, quickly and sternly. It made Hirell's tears pour forth. She dropped her burthen on the ground, and hid her face on Kezia's shoulder.

The sight did not move the pity, but roused the anger of Elias.

"What!" said he; "is this a child of mine

—shedding tears over such gauds as were worn by the daughters of Zion? Put them by!" he cried, turning to Hugh, and pointing to the heap of things on the table and to the open trunk. "Let them go out of my sight—out of my house—back to where they came from; back to the world of vanity, and deceit, and snares. Hirell, if you will not, or cannot assist, go; but do not hinder. Kezia, help Hugh to put those things in."

Kezia gently withdrew herself from Hirell, and went on her knees before the trunk, meekly laying in the things as Hugh gave them to her.

Hirell, as she stood alone, seemed to see every form and object before her begin to swell and sway; a chill crept over all her limbs; and she would have fallen but for the rough grasp of the minister's hand on her shoulder.

"The child is sick," he said, looking down at her kindly.

She struggled with her faintness a moment, then turned deathly white, and fell against him, cold and powerless.

Hugh and Kezia left their task, and went

to her then ; while the minister rested his foot on the open trunk, the better to support her.

Elias stood looking on with folded arms and compressed lips.

Robert and the curate could not take their eyes from her face till they saw the sweet faint colour returning to the cheek, and the little mouth struggling for breath. She opened her eyes, and looked at the minister gratefully. He was moved. He had no thought but that her distress was for the loss of her fine clothes—as Elias had so spoken ; but her anguish, and her pure and exquisite beauty penetrated to his rugged heart.

He glanced into the trunk, and shook his head as she opened her eyes upon him, and said, with a rough tenderness in his loud, harsh voice—

“ Foolish maiden ! what need hast *thou* of these things, thou lily of the field ? ”

Kezia led her to a seat in the chimney-corner, and Mr. Lloyd came and sat by her, trying to give her words of comfort.

“ You must let my daughter come and see you,” he said ; “ she is wiser in sorrow than

yourself. Your garb is the garb of poverty—so is hers, poor child! but, Hirell, it is black.”

Kezia and Hugh were again at work, under the direction of Elias; and the Reverend Ephraim Jones, seeing there was no staying the turn of his friend's mind, and having, moreover, a secret exultation in the spirit of stern integrity that was ruling him, tendered his hearty assistance; and fell-to, cording the hampers with as much vigour, good-will, and grim satisfaction, as if Satan himself were confined in them, to be banished piecemeal out of the world.

Hugh had been sent out to give orders for the red waggon to be taken back to its maker; and to stop the two gardeners, who were at work making paths, rooting up old shrubs, and planting new ones. Kezia was still busy, though even Elias and Ephraim Jones had paused, and were standing wiping their brows before the open window.

For a moment there was a pause and a deep silence, broken only by the stifled sobbing of the poor, frightened servant-girl, as she assisted Kezia.

In this pause and quietness, there came to the ears of all, with sad significance, the distant noise of the workmen at the chapel.

"Friend Ephraim," said Elias, turning to him with gleaming eyes, "the chapel shall *not* be stopped! What I have bought with this money for the uses of the flesh and the devil, I take back from the flesh and the devil; but rather than take that back which I have bought and consecrated for God's use, I will beg—I will beg!"

"And I, too, Elias;" answered the minister, extending his hand, red with the labour he had just ceased from. "I will beg for you rather than stop that work. One triumph you *shall* have—one sweet drop in your cup of bitterness!"

Hugh now came in with money in his hand, which had been given to one of the men entrusted to make a purchase at Dolgarrog. He gave it to Elias across the long, narrow table, on opposite sides of which the brothers were standing.

While Hugh was out, the servant, in fulfilling Kezia's orders, had moved the old clothes'-horse from before the harp.

Elias, as he took the money from Hugh, glanced round and round, and saw the instrument standing there. He glanced back at Hugh with the ferocity of a tigress who would defend her young from pain, and saw his eyes were on it with a great light in them.

Then the eyes of the brothers met. Elias dropt into a chair, covered his face with one hand, and flung the other across the table towards Hugh.

The lad's slim fingers for an instant quivered in a sort of agony over the clenched hand of Elias; then his young face and form became suddenly inspired as with the spirit of the ancient Celtic warriors. He rose, he touched his brother's hand with a light thrilling pressure, he spoke clearly and musically:

"Elias, do but lend it me to show you how I thank you, and it shall go back at once."

Elias lifted his heavy head to look after him as he went and uncovered the harp.

The minister watched him, and gave a sort of grunt of assent as he sat down.

"Ay, play to him, young man," he said; "comfort him, if you can. Comfort his heart, as David comforted the heart of Saul."



Hugh seated himself on a box beside the harp and began to play.

His prelude was rough, chaotic—stormy. The minister liked it, and half-groaned now and then, in sympathy with its strength and mountainous rudeness. Minute after minute passed without one sweet strain coming. Robert Chamberlayne began to think he did not like the harp ; but Hugh's other listeners were all Welsh mountaineers, and knew well to what loveliness they were climbing so laboriously. The change was sudden—instantaneous. All at once, out of that tumultuous, crashing, winter of sound, the summer of his music stole upon them—perfect, fresh, dewy, full-blossomed, balmy, intoxicating.

In one minute Hugh had made a heaven, and drawn every soul present into it. Hirell came and sat on a low box near him, her sweet face lifted like a flower, athirst for dew. Elias kept his hand before his eyes. Kezia watched him with the joy of a mother who has seen water in the desert for her perishing children.

Workmen from the chapel, who had come

to ask questions about their work, crept near the open window, keeping out of sight.

Young god of the world he had made, Hugh sat glowing with triumph, and smiling with happy scorn on the baskets of the up-gathered feast of fortune from which he had been driven.

He stopped—gave up his godhood, and became—a man? No, a boy—flushed, trembling, abashed.

Elias slowly moved his hand from his eyes.  
“Hugh!”

In an instant Hugh's hand was in his. Then a cry of more passionate love went from Elias :

“Hirell!”

The girl cried out and ran to him.

“Come,” said the curate, softly, to Robert ; and they went out.

The Reverend Ephraim Jones stood irresolute, then went towards the door.

Before he reached it, a broken voice called after him—

“Nay, friend Ephraim, do not leave us. I had prepared to receive you a table on

which was spread good silver plate and wine. But stay with me now, I entreat you, and eat at my table, though my 'silver is become dross,' and my 'wine is mixed with water.'"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### ROBERT CHAMBERLAYNE DOES ELIAS YET ANOTHER SERVICE.

WHEN Robert Chamberlayne left Bod Elian, he went back to the Abbey farm with the Curate, and did not return to Dolgarrog till the shops were closing, and the guide to Criba Ban was driving out his hard-worked ponies into the meadow behind the town.

A group stood round the door of the old Council House. Robert recognized the little tailor to whom Hugh's clothes had been sent back. He was reading the list of things he had made for the young man, to the gentle amazement of Butty Hughes; who sat near the door of the little shop, enjoying the freshness of the evening air, the salutations of his neighbours as they passed, and the gossip about Elias Morgan's change of fortune, which

was the theme of the day. His wife stood knitting behind his chair, her soft dark eyes ever ready to answer his upturned look of childlike wonder, and her lips always replying with a gentle sympathetic—

“There master ! Only to think !”

His eyes brightened with fresh anticipation at the sight of Robert, at whose approach the others moved aside ; and he became almost tearful with disappointment, when the young man strode in, merely nodding as he passed him.

Robert went through the shop, across the tiny parlour, up the steep little stairs, and entering the sitting-room he shared with Rymer, found his friend lying on the sofa apparently asleep.

“He has been over-doing it to-day,” he said to himself as he noticed the air of utter exhaustion which Rymer’s figure and pale face wore as he lay.

Robert seated himself at the open window, and lit a cigar.

There was nothing pleasant to look upon now in the King’s square. The covered market place was empty, and the gas turned

out. The night came darkening down, soft and calm, but starless.

But for a reluctance to wake Rymer, Robert would have rung for candles. If he had any poetry at all in him, he certainly cared nothing for its shady side: his spirit throve not in that. He suspected "blight" in every sunless day. He felt his own weakness in this respect as he sat at the window of the old Council House, looking on the dull grey buildings, the darker mountain lines, and still darker sky. "I know," he thought to himself, "I should have a devil of a temper if things went wrong with me."

And he felt that his mind had lost its balance as it was. Hirell's scarcely disguised pain at the thoughts of a marriage with him, Elias's sharp bitter tones, still caused him not a little disquietude and humiliation.

He had relieved his mind a little by sending an anonymous subscription for the chapel; and there was another matter in which he hoped to serve his cousin, and it was the thoughts of this that made him glance impatiently towards Rymer.

It was not till Mrs. Hughes brought up

the candles, that the latter opened his eyes and got up.

"So you are back," he said, coming to the window.

Then Robert brightened, and told him some of the results of his communication to Elias ; and it was not long before he brought out what had been in his mind concerning Rymer for some hours.

"You said you had some thoughts of spending a month or two up among the mountains."

"I was thinking of it, certainly," answered Rymer, vaguely ; "but why do you mention that in connection with your cousin ?"

"Well," said Robert, "I have promised Kezia Williams, his housekeeper,—that stiff nun-like woman you saw with them on Sunday—I have promised her to try and find them a lodger, as they intend to let the two new rooms that have been just built. She came down about it to the Abbey Farm this afternoon. She thinks of furnishing the rooms with some things she left at Aber, when she came to live at Bod Elian. I was thinking if you wanted, as you said—

privacy and quiet—you'd get enough of both there."

"I thank you. I'm sure I should like the sort of place," replied Rymer, "but my plans are changed, I fancy; however, I'll let you know to-morrow morning."

That question of his staying or going, was one he was forced quickly to decide, irrespective of Chamberlayne's proposal. For his own part he would have been glad to go—to leave Wales, England, Europe—to give way to the feverish restlessness that possessed him, and made stillness unendurable. But could he leave while so uncertain as to what the consequences of his selfishness might have been to Catherine Rhys? He could not—he knew he could not. No, he said, he *must* stay—and yet he dared not stay here in Dolgarrog—too many eyes were on him—too many strangers coming daily through the town. He would seek concealment among those solitary mountains—he would be Elias Morgan's lodger.

"I am sick of this place," said he to Robert, after they had been smoking their cigars in silence for half an hour—almost forgetting each other's existence. "If I decide on stay-



ing, I might want to move to-morrow, and you say the rooms are not furnished?"

"I could soon see if Kezia couldn't accommodate you somehow," said Robert. "I'm almost sure she could, if you would not mind sharing with the rest for a few days."

Rymer felt anxious now to decide the matter at once. He took some letters from his pocket, and appeared to consult them, then looked up with a quick dry cough, and said to Robert—

"Upon my word, I don't see any use in leaving it uncertain. I think I'll say that if you like to arrange it with your people to have me to-morrow, I'll come."

"Very well," said Robert. "I'll walk up to Bod Elian before breakfast to-morrow, and settle it all with Kezia."

## CHAPTER XV.

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It was past nine o'clock when the young men arrived at Bod Eliau ; and Elias Morgan had already given orders that the house door should be closed and supper delayed no longer for the new inmate who had been expected since noon.

Robert took him round to the back, where they saw light coming from an open door.

" Ah, here is Nanny," he said ; " you must make friends with her. She's the belle of Capel Iltyd. Listen—she sings well."

Rymer looked in and saw a young woman ironing in a large un-English-looking outer kitchen. There were rude farming implements hanging on the damp walls and standing in corners—a low fire burnt dimly in the chimney, and sent puffs of smoke over the

girl's head as she stood with her back to it and her face towards a young man who leant indolently against the empty dresser. A little stream of water from the leaking tap ran along the sloping stones to the door, over which a piece of the roof was broken through and a long garland of ivy trailed down from it.

"So, Nanny," said Robert, "you had shut us out."

Nanny stared, and took a sudden dislike to Rymer's pale face and dull unobservant eyes.

"Lodger late, Mr. Robert," said she. "Elias Morgan very angry," and she stood with her hands on her hips regarding the new inmate of Bod Elian with critical and somewhat disdainful eyes.

"Come, Nanny, don't be cross," said Robert, "this gentleman takes a great interest in your country. I hope you'll do your best to make him comfortable while he's here."

"Nothing to do with it, Mr. Robert," answered Nanny, leaning against the chimney side, "make no one comfortable here no more, going away."

She strode leisurely across to the door of the inner kitchen, which she flung open roughly; and marching in a few yards, turned round with her fists in her sides, and surveyed the two visitors as they entered the room where Elias Morgan and his family were assembled; and then she walked out again with a slow, contemptuous swing of her limbs, and without glancing at any of the family from whose circle she had been banished.

Elias Morgan had effectually cleared his house of all signs of the abundance and confusion which yesterday morning prevailed there. Austere order and cold poverty had once more linked hands, and taken command of his household; and Elias sat at the head of his table, his old account book and Bible before him, his sad grey eye sternly watchful of the drooping young faces around him, as if he would detect and punish even a thought that rebelled against the new and bitter rule. Yet the faces seemed all sufficiently meek and resigned even to the Reverend Ephraim Jones, who sat writing at a little table by the fire, and who could not quite understand that

which was spread good silver plate and wine. But stay with me now, I entreat you, and eat at my table, though my 'silver is become dross,' and my 'wine is mixed with water.'"

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sitting at his right on a low seat, and so near to him that Rymer had not noticed it before. It rose up now, and he saw in a patched old gown and with some coarse needlework in her hand, the girl whose delicate beauty had seemed to fill the grey market-place of Dolgarrog with light. He looked into the same face now, but its sweet glad light was gone. The hazel eyes were clouded, the cheeks pale, the lips set in that firm, pathetic closure which seems to betoken the soul's desire to lock itself in alone with its sorrow.

Rymer looked at Hirell with cold, vaguely observant eyes, bowed and turned away to the seat indicated by Elias.

Hirell sat down, penetrated with wonder and pity by the pale suffering face into which she had glanced.

Rymer stood with his hand on the back of his chair, looking on the people among whom he had chosen to make his home much as a mourner in a funeral coach looks out upon the scenery and incidents of the road ; knowing that nothing can alter the sad purport of his journey. They were strange to him, and perhaps it was better for those restless thoughts

out. The night came darkening down, soft and calm, but starless.

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shone, for the owners, a tender light of traditional greatness ; but time and poverty had brought them in contact with strange company ; the delicate, thin-edged basin, in which some fair ancestress had placed a royal gift of roses, held now its owners' humble supper of buttermilk ; a beautiful, fragile little cup rested on a plate of commonest ware, while on the wafer edge of another, reclined a pewter spoon. Among the clumsy horn and wooden knife handles were one or two of some antiquity and value. It was looking at these made Rymer aware that the one he held was different from all the others, being small and light.

He looked at it with a half unconscious curiosity, and saw that it was almost new, and that it had a pretty mother-of-pearl handle, on which some letters were engraved. His lips moved silently with the name the letters made. It was "*Hirell Morgan.*"

Hirell saw the examination of the knife, (her christening present), placed by herself and Kezia for the stranger's use, as the most modern in the house ; and she saw also the lips moving over her name, and then the sad

eyes glance absently across at her, showing she was remembered in connection with the name : and though they were so absent, and looking out as it seemed from such vast distances of sorrow, she could not help dropping her own confusedly, and blushing under his gaze.

"Young man," said Ephraim Jones, suddenly looking over his spectacles at Hugh, "Listen to this." He spread out a letter he had been writing, and cleared his throat.

"It is," said he, "to my friend, James Griffith, the manager of Messrs. Tidmans', and I hope it fittingly expresses your desires and intentions."

Hugh looked from Rymer to Ephraim Jones, with a glance of quick, eager remonstrance ; and the minister saw and understood it, but in his bold and downright way of dealing with things, he had little patience with such refinements of feeling ; and he chose now to overlook Hugh's silent allusion to the presence of Rymer, with grim sarcasm and indifference, and began to read.

Elias listened with profound attention, Hugh with averted face, Robert with evident

annoyance for Hugh; whilst Hirell and Kezia turned their faces reverentially but sadly towards the reader.

“DEAR JAMES,

“Can you find a place in your office for a young man possessing some ability, but no business experiences whatever? His age is twenty-one, his moral character good, and I doubt not, that he would, under strong discipline, such as you have always been remarkable for exercising, prove of some use in a humble post. He would be willing to place himself in some family of strictly religious principles and orderly habits, so that his services to Messrs. Tidman should not suffer in consequence of late hours, or through any of the evils which surround the young and ignorant on first acquaintance with the world. I should not, of course, ask higher remuneration than would enable him to subsist with rigorous economy, and an unflagging self-denial, such as his youth and health render him quite capable of exercising. He writes a good hand, but is a poor accountant, and quite unused to application. This is, however, a

quality he would soon gain at your hands ; and I have no doubt, that with the grace of God, he would prove a useful and faithful servant to Messrs. Tidman, to whom have the kindness to convey my respectful remembrance, and show this letter.

“ I shall speak of myself and my progress on this Welsh mission when I see you, which, God willing, will be at the end of the present week. Trusting you will oblige me in the matter of which I have written, I am, dear Sir,

“ Yours truly,

“ EPHRAIM JONES.”

The minister as he refolded his letter looked at Hugh with eyes that seemed not asking but demanding his approbation of it. Elias looked at him in much the same way, but his gaze had also something of entreaty.

Hugh remained still with his face turned away from Rymer ; his cheek was burning, his eyes were cast down in painful thought.

Ephraim Jones began to rap with his thick fingers impatiently on the table, and to lower his shaggy eyebrows.



"Well, young man," said he, "may we presume that you concur with the sentiments expressed in this letter, and intend to forward them to the best of your ability?"

"I hope you'll pardon me, sir," cried Robert, no longer able to contain himself, "but I really must say this is not business-like—it is not indeed. A fellow like Hugh, with his education and talents, to be spoken of in that way, why you couldn't say less of any ignorant shop boy. Do let me try, Elias," he said, turning to the elder brother eagerly, "what *I* can do before this letter is sent. I am sure I could find him a situation better than any such a letter as that can bring him."

Hugh's eyes filled with a grateful moisture as Robert spoke. Then he turned them entreatingly towards his brother.

"May this be so, Elias?" he asked. "May Robert try for me, and may that letter be delayed?"

"Hugh," answered Elias slowly, "I am satisfied with that letter. Robert Chamberlayne!"—and all the wrath and bitterness of his sorrow rose in his voice and eyes as he turned towards his cousin—"have I had such

good reason to be satisfied with *your* judgment as to accept of it a second time?"

"I have done, Morgan," replied Robert quickly; "You know how to silence me, and you use your knowledge generously. Even for Hugh's sake I can say no more," and he got up from the table.

"Come, come, friend Elias," interposed Ephraim Jones, "let there not be an angry parting between you and your young relative. He means well. If he condemns my letter for being unbusiness-like, it is because he differs from me in his notions of the quality and intent of business. *You* are satisfied?"

"I am," answered Elias, "and I trust that Hugh has more respect for our opinions and wishes than for those of a person even less serious and enlightened than himself. What do you say, brother?"

Hugh did not answer; but as Robert moved to wish Kezia farewell, his eyes followed him with the yearning of a prisoner who sees his would-be deliverer turned from the gaol gate.

"Good-bye, Kezia," said Robert, "I mustn't stay here, a wolf among lambs, any longer."

Kezia's eyes were turned anxiously towards Hugh, to whose side she went when Robert had shaken hands with her, and gone round to Hirell.

"Hugh," said Elias, with that peculiar thickening of the voice which came to him in moments of excitement, "I have heard no word of approval or acknowledgment, yet, of this service which our friend Ephraim Jones is doing you."

Hugh still remained silent, in sadness rather than in obstinacy or anger. Kezia, as she sat by him, gently plucked his sleeve and whispered,

"Dear Hugh, say something. Oh think! has he not enough to bear?"

She had a tender winning voice, and eyes like it, and Hugh looked at her and received their persuasion passively.

In a minute he turned his head wearily to the minister.

"I thank you, sir, for what you have done," he said.

"And will he take thanks from you, sir, so grudging?" asked Elias, with rising anger.

"Enough, my boy, enough," cried the

minister, extending his great arm across to take Hugh's hand. "Elias, you require too much of the young man. Could the captives of Israel thank him who should point out for them the road of their exile?"

Robert leaned over Hirell's chair, and said—

"Good-bye, Hirell!" and she looked up at him with eyes so brimful of her own griefs, that they asked and won of him forgiveness for being too heedless of his. He even smiled as he pressed her hand, and all the pleasantness of his liking came over her.

Their friendship had been founded on simple knowledge of each other, and the habit of being and thinking together. As no admiration on either side made them exaggerate its strength, all that there was of it was genuine, and knit into their very natures. It was like that primitive mysterious link between blood relations, that is often never felt till it is suddenly broken by some bitter family dissension or death. Hirell's liking for Robert was as a stream that ran too deep and strong to make any of the murmurings by which a shallower one attracts and excites the mind. If her

bright imagination had once looked down into it, it might have burst into sunny beauty; but as it was, it flowed silently and unseen—refreshing her without her knowledge.

“Good-bye, Robert,” said Hirell, and their hands clasped with clinging earnestness.

All had risen to take leave of Robert, except the lodger, who sat at the table still, either lost in thought, or anxious to appear unobservant of the disagreements that had taken place.

The simple hospitality of Elias would not allow him to sit while his guest and kinsman took his departure; but the attitude in which he stood at the head of the table, and the expression on his face of unmoved severity, did not encourage Robert to take any steps towards lessening the breach between them.

He had wished them all good-bye, and now approached Elias.

“Well, good-night, Morgan,” he said, and held out his hand.

“Good-night, Robert Chamberlayne,” answered Elias, as he took coldly the proffered hand.

Robert noticed the coldness, became flushed and irritated, then turned to go.

"The lantern," demanded Elias, turning slowly to Kezia.

She brought it, and they were not surprised to see him follow Robert ; for it was his common custom to light any one who went away at a late hour beyond the first white gate. Hirell and Hugh went after them.

Robert remembered the last time he left Bod Elian they had all followed him then, but not silently as to-night ; the long, stone passages and kitchens had rung with blithe farewells, and entreaties that innumerable commissions with which he was charged, might be remembered ; that letters might be quickly answered ; that nobody and nothing about the farm might ever be forgotten by him ; and now he had nothing to do for any of them ; no one had asked him to write, or wished to be remembered by him. He longed to turn back and tell Hugh that he might rely on his friendship when he came to London, but he dared not, for Elias was between them.

Hirell fully expected some outburst from

Robert at the injustice with which he was being treated. It was like a dream to her to see him go—after once turning his face towards her—out of the gate and down the hill, and then to feel that he was gone.

Her father's harshness to Robert made her own thoughts of him kinder than they would otherwise have been. She laid her hand on the gate, and looked down in the direction of his footsteps sounding crisply on the slaty path, and falling into the rhythm of the fresh autumn night.

The light fringe of garden trees waved airily on her left, and seemed to lean and hearken after the footsteps with her; and the water in the deep ravine to hurry and cry louder; while the oxen in the field showed their breath in the faint starlight, as they turned towards the sound.

It went on, further and fainter, and seemed to leave a chill behind it; and when it was quite gone from Hirell's hearing, and she took her arms from the gate and gazed round, the garden trees looked still and dull, the water plunged down the ravine with a crashing, gloomy monotony, the oxen lowered their

heavy heads again, and tore and chewed the tough, dry grass. He who like the fairy prince would have changed it all, was gone, and the place left still under the dreary spell.

Elias had given Hugh the lantern, and was waiting for Hirell.

"Father," she said, as she came up to him, "I want to ask you if I have done right or wrong in some matter in which I have acted without asking your advice."

"What is it, Hirell?" he said, gravely.

"Robert Chamberlayne has asked me to marry him, and I told him I cannot."

Whatever Elias felt at the news, he kept concealed in his own breast. He said not a word till they had nearly reached the door, and then he asked her—

"Was it before—before this bubble burst, or after?"

"After he knew of it all, but before he let us know."

He looked at her—pausing in the doorway to do so, as they were entering—he looked at her with a keen, penetrating glance, and then across at the gate by which Robert had gone away.



"I thought of myself alone when I answered him," said Hirell. "If he had asked me after all this, I cannot tell but perhaps for all our sakes, I might have been tempted to give him a different answer."

"And he saw this when he decided to speak to you first! I honour Robert for it, Hirell. I shall write and tell him so."

"I care enough for him to be very glad to hear you say that, father," answered Hirell gratefully.

They went into the house, and Elias shut the door, and followed her into the kitchen.

They found there Ephraim Jones and the lodger, by no means in a friendly attitude towards each other, and Kezia looking on in much distress.

"I maintain, sir," the minister was saying, "that it is utterly beneath the manners of a Christian—or what I suppose is a stronger word in your vocabulary—a gentleman."

"May I trouble you for my candle?" said Rymer to Kezia.

"What is this, Ephraim?" enquired Elias.

"Friend Morgan," said the minister, "have I not rightly informed this person in telling

him that every one under your roof is expected to be present at evening prayers ?”

“It is my rule,” answered Elias.

“And one which by no means should you permit to be broken,” cried the minister.

“My candle, if you please,” repeated Rymer to Kezia, who stood looking hesitatingly from one to another.

“Your candle,” said Ephraim Jones ; “and what candle, sir, will light you in the darkness of a night unhallowed by prayer ?”

“Shall we begin at once, friend Ephraim ?” proposed Elias, “as Mr. Rymer appears anxious to retire ; and, indeed, it is growing later than I thought,” he added, looking at the clock.

“You are very kind,” said the lodger ; “but pray do not alter your arrangements on my account, for I am going at once to my room. Oblige me with a candle.”

And he took it with a bow from Kezia’s yielding hand, saying, “I fear I must trouble you to show me what bed-room I am to occupy.”

She turned a perplexed look on her master.

“Elias,” said the minister, “it is your duty

to uphold, like the ancient fathers of Israel, the statutes of your house."

"Surely, sir," interposed Hugh, who had just entered and seen how things stood between their guest and lodger, "Mr. Rymer can do as he likes. He is not under the obligation of a visitor. He buys a home of us, and I cannot see how our share in the bargain is to be fair unless we give him a home with all its privileges and liberties."

"And one of the privileges and liberties he is to enjoy," said the minister, "is letting Satan find a passage through his heart to your very fireside. Take heed, Elias! May not the exposure of one sheep bring the wolf into the fold—or the carelessness of one soldier betray the whole garrison?"

The word of the Reverend Ephraim Jones was law at Bod Eliau, and all stood irresolute and perplexed. Every one, even Elias himself, would have been glad to let the lodger have his will, and relieve them of his presence, yet no one dared volunteer to show him the way to his room.

Rymer's position was even more embarrassing. He stood with the candle in his

hand determined upon going, yet not knowing in the least which way to turn.

At last he remembered Nanny, and instantly he did so, went towards the kitchen where he had seen her.

Hirell and Kezia were thankful to hear them going upstairs together ; and to see by the manner in which Ephraim Jones flung into a chair, and opened his Bible, that he had given up the contest.

“Perverse and stubborn spirit,” he cried, shaking his head at the door by which Rymer had gone out ; “God grant that this night sleep alone may visit him, for if death got hold of him, sharp indeed were its sting, and great ‘the grave’s victory.’ But come friends, come fellow soldiers, maimed and weary—before we leave the battle-field to rest under the tent of night, let us kneel down at our Commander’s feet, and make known to him the defeats and triumphs of the day, and ask of him that he will enlighten us as to the duties of to-morrow.”

They all knelt, and he prayed—specially mentioning Hugh in his prayer—and setting forth such a terrible vista of temptations to

be passed through by the young man as to make the women tremble, and redouble the anxiety of Elias.

Hirell knelt where she could see the minister's face ; but it was not while he was praying that she cared so much to look at it, but when his prayer was finished. Then, as if the loud voluminous tones of his own voice had acted like a kind of thunder on his mental atmosphere, and cleared it of the evils which filled it, keeping him for ever watchful and antagonistic, his face grew calm, peaceful, radiant.

His eyes swam in glad light, like the eyes of a soldier who descries through the battle's smoke, and lines of interknitting steel, the green hills of the land on which he would set his foot as a conqueror.

Hirell gazed at him in childlike wonder and reverence as he knelt there, his large red face slightly raised, his thick lips firmly set, his nostrils distended, his blotched forehead updrawn in thick lines, his eyes full of tender ecstasy.

Did he see his little boy who had been taken from him, Hirell wondered. Did he

see him on those glorious shores to which he looked? The look was so humanly as well as divinely happy, she almost thought he must.

She would have liked to ask him when they rose from their knees, but it was not permissible at Bod Eliau to hold any converse after the last prayers of the day. She could not forbear touching his great hand with her lips when he wished her good-night and blessed her.

Then Elias went first with the one light which was to be set in the passage before their partly open doors to serve for all.

They were all on the broad oak staircase together, Elias foremost with the candle, then Hirell and Kezia, then Hugh with his two dogs, who always lay at his door, and Ephraim Jones came guarding the rear, his great Bible in his hand.

As he passed Rymer's door, he could not himself forbear breaking the silence by a deep groan, which so startled Hugh's dogs that they growled ominously till silenced by their young master's foot.

Rymer heard both sounds, and felt as strange in his bedchamber as he had done at the supper-table of his new Welsh home.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### HIRELL.

THE autumn rains set in now with persistent force, making the slow monotonous days at Bod Elian pass still more slowly and monotonously, and impoverishing Elias Morgan's scant harvest fields.

In spite of the wet weather, the lodger spent most of his time out of doors, and when he remained in shunned the family, and shut himself up in his own room. He was so irregular in his habits, as to cause Elias no little annoyance.

On some mornings he would not come from his bedroom till nearly noon, on others Elias met him returning before breakfast from the barren hills behind Moel Mawr. He was an inexhaustible theme for gossip and speculation in the village of Capel Illtyd, where every



morning a group assembled at the little post-office to compare notes and discuss him. At Bod Elian no such gossip was permitted. Elias, while in his heart resenting his lodger's apparent contempt for his rules, sternly silenced all curious comments and speculations concerning him.

Before Ephraim Jones left Wales, Elias gave him a simple account of what he had himself observed about Rymer, making no mention of reports that had come to him, and the minister had answered—

“It is manifest to me he is at war with the enemy of the world. Bear with him while this appears so ; honour him if he seems to you victorious ; cast him from your house if you see signs of his being conquered, for Satan will use him there for no good purpose.”

Elias, while much impressed with this view of the case, did not see exactly how to deal with it, finding it impossible to tell by his lodger's moods whether he or his supposed antagonist was enjoying the best of the conflict.

But Elias had little time and few thoughts

to spare away from the hard duties of his farm and household, and it was much the same with every one else at Bod Elian. Kezia was busied with preparations—very humble ones this time—for Hugh's departure. Hugh intended to be of wonderful assistance to Elias with the harvest work, but he was restless and pre-occupied—as most people are on the eve of a great change. Elias was very patient with him, and never told him he was doing him more harm than good.

The lad had already recovered so much hope concerning his prospects in London, that Elias began to have less anxiety about him.

His greatest care was Hirell. It was the thought of her that so often kept his weary eyes from closing at night, and that made his meagre harvest bitter to him.

She was drooping daily—in spirits and in health—he saw it—he had seen it from the very day when the great shock had come to them. He watched her in perplexity and fear. If she had fretted and complained he would have understood that as the natural effect of disappointment. But he never saw

her in tears ; and if she sometimes spoke impatiently, it was never on the subject of their poverty—but generally to Kezia for showing too much concern for her.

Sometimes Elias returning with his little cart full of spare sheaves up the field in front of the house, would see Hirell between the garden trees standing lost in sad thought. He would have given up his best acre to know what kind of thought it was. Did the girl reproach him in her own mind, he wondered, for letting her enjoy too much the fruits of their brief prosperity ?

One day Nest Lloyd, the curate's daughter, who had visited them two or three times since their trouble, called and left some books for Hirell.

Elias watched her when Nest was gone—taking up one volume after another and throwing each down again impatiently. He went over to the settle where she sat, and looked at the titles.

“And did the child of a minister of the gospel advise you to read *these* ?” he said. “They are novels, the work of those who think the world so deficient in wickedness

and vanity they must needs imagine more. Hirell, you will not read these?"

"Very well, father," she acquiesced, wearily.

He was touched by her passiveness. It rather pained him, appearing as if she had no interest in anything. He felt himself growing weak enough to wish she would ask leave to read one of the books, and detecting the weakness, said sternly—

"Such works are most pernicious."

"It is a pity then that some of them are so beautiful," answered Hirell.

"Then they have corrupted your mind already, or you could not think so," said her father.

"Perhaps that is it," she returned, sadly, but quite simply, and without a touch of satirical meaning in her voice.

Elias was more and more disappointed. He now quite longed for her to ask for one of the books; and was so angry with himself for the feeling that he put them aside and said—

"See that these are sent back, and no more of their kind allowed to enter this house."

"Yes, father," said Hirell, without looking a bit distressed or disappointed.

"And do you take pleasure in reading such things?" asked Elias, hoping still to draw a request from her.

"While I am reading them—yes," answered Hirell; "I have found the greatest happiness I have ever known in reading two or three—but I think it must be a kind of fool's paradise, for I find my own life so much duller afterwards. At all events I know I am the sadder for reading them. I know it is better for me to give them up."

The sight of the books going away cost Elias far more regret than it did Hirell. He could not understand her. She was a mystery to him, but he had a deep faith in her; he was certain that the mystery hid something good and beautiful that his mind was too dense to understand. He had no wish to see her mind brought to the level of his own, nor did he ever once tell himself she was better left to her own thoughts, and that there could be nothing in common between them. The more saintly and beautiful she seemed to him, the more his heart cried out that she was his child—the more his mind yearned up to hers. He was frightened of his love and reverence

for her—frightened that they might weaken his hand as a father and guide, and in this fear he often dealt more harshly with her than any one else.

He was sitting one morning at his bureau, in the close little parlour, busy at accounts, when the door opened and closed, and without hearing a step on the carpet he knew that Hirell stood near him.

“Are you very busy, father? may I speak to you?” she said.

His hard fingers fluttered nervously among the bills in the bureau. It was an unusual thing her coming to him in this way.

“Surely, Hirell;” he answered, half turning towards her.

She sat down on one of the old horse-hair chairs, and fell with a grace indescribable for its gentle naturalness into her customary attitude, her elbow in one hand, and her chin in the other.

“Father,” she said, “Ephraim Jones was talking with me the other night before he left us, about my going away from home and doing something to earn my own living.”

Elias turned his face towards the bill-file,

and moved the papers up and down. After a minute he moistened his lips, and said—

“ Well, Hirell ? ”

“ I have thought a great deal about it, and I feel it would be better, much better if I did.”

Her cheek was flushed, and her hazel eyes were very earnest as she met her father’s slow, puzzled gaze.

“ You wish to go away from home, Hirell ? ” he asked her, slowly.

“ I wish it very much.”

She had no thought of paining him. She had conjectured he might disapprove of her wish, that he might refuse to gratify it, but it had never occurred to her that he might be shocked or hurt. He had so carefully concealed his heart behind his conscience, that those belonging to him had almost forgotten it lived and felt. Hirell had great veneration for his character ; he seemed to her to embody all that was grand in the old puritans, of whom she delighted to read. She had also a strong love for him ; but this she looked on from childhood as a useless possession, for ever since she could run alone she had been taught

to do all that she did for duty's, not love's sake. To her he was faultless, but cold and unmoved by human weakness as a rock.

When she watched him moving the papers in the bureau, she was disturbed by no fear but of her wish being denied to her.

"Will you tell me, Hirell," asked Elias, very gently, "why you think it better for you to leave home?"

"I'm afraid I cannot see all the reasons plain enough to tell them to you," said Hirell, "but one great thing that I want to go for is——"

She hesitated. Elias thought she doubted his power of understanding her, but Hirell's doubt was all of herself.

"What is the one great thing you want to go for, Hirell?" he asked.

"To see," she answered, "to see if life everywhere is as hard and dull, and unlike all the beautiful life in books as it is here."

"No," said Elias, a faint colour rising in his cheek, "it is not. I can answer for that, Hirell. You might go far and find no place so poor as your father's house just now. It is no wonder you should wish to leave it."



"No," cried Hirell, her sweet voice ringing out with sudden passion, "father, it is not that—it is not that. My want I cannot tell you. I do not know—unless it be I want the wish to live—but at least I cannot find it here. Oh let me go, I want to find out not only for myself, but for us all, which is false—all the things I read and think of, or this life—this sad, sad life we all lead here."

Elias leaned his elbow on the bureau, and his forehead in his hand, for some time, without answering.

At last he looked up with heavy, wistful eyes.

"I believe, Hirell," he said, "you have thoughts which I cannot understand, and I do not think it is because they are too foolish, but because they are too deep. In this case I had better leave it to your own wish to go or stay. If you think it for your good to go, then go, but——"

He stopped suddenly, and Hirell looked round in gentle surprise.

His head as he sat at the bureau, with his back towards her, was upright when she turned, but as she looked, it drooped forwards,

and the hard hands received it, the fingers quivering as if they would reason with and uphold it against its weakness.

Hirell's eyes dilated, and filled with water and light—her heart swelled. She looked at the bent figure. Would it turn upon her angrily in a minute? Should she go out of the room? She felt he would wish she should.

She did go a few steps, but came back and stood near him.

She laid her hand upon his shoulder, requiring all her courage to do so. He was difficult to approach in his lightest moods. Was she not daring too much to come near him in his sorrow?

"Father," she said, schooling her voice, that her yearning sympathy might not show itself, and annoy or startle him, and there was only perceptible in its music a faint breath of the passion she crushed down, that stole sweetly into his senses, like the perfume of a trodden flower, "Father, have I vexed you? am I wrong in what I have asked?"

He raised his head slowly and looked at her. The tenderness in her eyes was like some strange transfiguring light upon her. He

gazed at her as at something holy and far off, and shook his head.

"No, Hirell," he said, "if it seems right to you to go—go—but—I—"

The flinty eyes filled, and turned from her slowly, as he added—

"I was sorry, for I had need of you. I had need of you."

She stood a minute—her face streaming with large calm tears.

Then she knelt by him and clasped her hands on his knee.

"Father," she said, "how wise you are! Oh I am amazed to think what wisdom God has given you. You have lighted all my darkness; you have shown me what my want was."

"My child! what was it?"

She put her arms up round his neck, and laid her wet face on his bosom, whispering with a deep joy,

"Oh, father, my need was that you *should* need me."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A BEAM OF LIGHT.

THE earliest step on the oak stairs of Bod Elian, next morning, was Hirell's.

The night had been one of awakening instead of sleep for her ; she had for the first time been brought to understand how all the sternness and strength with which her father had encountered their late misfortune had been wrung from a nature sensitive as her own ; less selfishly, more nobly sensitive she felt. How easily had the blow struck her down ! How helpless, how weak she had been while all the household had been patiently and bravely bearing their increased burdens ! Poor Hugh was to be cast inexperienced, unprepared as he was, into the world, to make his own way as best he might.

Kezia, in addition to the heavier housework

that Hirell's negligence had imposed on her, was earning a few pence a week by knitting stockings for the post office shop of Capel Illyd; and was so anxious over this private little scheme of hers that Hirell had once seen her fingers moving, in her sleep, as if busy with needles and worsteds.

"And I have done nothing since that miserable day," she thought, "but neglect what little work I did before, and add seriously to their anxiety."

Then came the question, at first put passionately to herself, then fervently and entreatingly to God, "What can I do? what can I do?"

Then she laid still and thought. She longed to be of great service to them all. She felt capable of achieving some act of heroism, if only it might be pointed out to her; but she at once saw the danger of any such dream keeping her from accepting humbly and with fitting earnestness, the small, insignificant duties, which alone were ready to her hand.

When in the morning she looked into her small dressing-glass nailed to the window-frame, the sight of her face, the beauty of

which was intensified by the tenderness and enthusiasm that had sprung up in her heart, had a strange effect upon her. She took it as an evidence that the purity and light belonging to one of the elect were still in her spirit ; and that her labours in the house, humble as they might be, were to be blessed by God.

With her feet unshod and her clumsy wooden shoes in her arm, that her steps on the bare oak stairs might not disturb the weary sleepers, she came from her room fresh, bright, noiseless as the sunbeams on the old stone walls ; and, in so doing, startled back into his room a certain restless spirit who was slowly opening his door and meditating an escape from the house when the fair apparition appeared before him.

She did not see him, but sat down on the seat of the old window on the stairs to look at the sun shining over her father's fields. They had yielded nearly all their little harvest, and were looking empty and worn out ; but Hirell's gaze rested on them tenderly, and found a pathetic beauty in what others would have seen but as stony barren wastes. There bloomed for her, at their corners and edges,

memories brighter than the blue cornflowers, and richer than the scarlet poppies of Robert Chamberlayne's Kentish fields. How many years had these black furrows and clods drank the sweat of hands dear to her! By what hopes at sowing time, and disappointments at harvest, were they not consecrated! She wondered she could have longed so to leave them; her eye glistened with joy to think how gently she had been turned back. And, thinking this, Hirell rose and went down the stairs, pausing sometimes to feel how very still the house was; and to listen, with her finger on her lip, to the deep calm breathing she could hear from the upper rooms. There was something strange to her in this feeling. She told Kezia afterwards that she thought God must have called her to show her how sweet and sacred He kept the house during their helplessness.

All the time she was descending, her face was looking up towards where the sleepers lay, with a smile of deep, reverential joy; and she whispered softly to herself, as she thought of all their trouble,

“He giveth his beloved sleep.”

The ticking of the old clock in the hall seemed to give no suggestion of haste, or even progression, but seemed rather like the measured tread of pacing feet, as if time himself had turned sentinel to watch them. As Hirell took her hat from the row that lay on the bench by the door, it seemed to her a stranger might almost tell the characters of the owners by looking at them. There was her father's tall-crowned beaver, with a curve in its brim, which had a rigid obstinate look peculiar to itself. There was Hugh's soft felt with the crushed crown, old and soiled, but with careless grace in every line as it lay upon the bench. There was Kezia's—of the ancient sugar-loaf shape—prim, and straight, and neat; and there was the large low-crowned beaver worn by the Reverend Ephraim Jones on his visits to Bod Elian; which, with its nap turned the wrong way, had caught the antagonistic expression of its wearer's face and form.

Hirell took her own from among them, and went out into the square flat field in front of the house, where the cows were standing by the wall waiting for Nanny to milk them.



There was a wild freshness in the morning, a joyous hurrying of water, gushes of birds' song glad and loud, flying armies of yellow leaves mad with liberty, a merry minstrel in every tree shaking music from it, and rain-drops that came dashing brightly down like tears shaken off by laughter.

Blithely as a child Hirell ran against the breeze, and came laughing and singing among the cows, which she caressed and spoke to separately with that soft drawl in the voice with which one often speaks to children or animals.

In the old times, when nothing but poverty and hard toil was expected at Bod Elian, Hirell had always helped Nanny with the milking ; but she discontinued this directly the news came of their good fortune, for she had always disliked the task, and other and far pleasanter duties were thronging to her hand.

She had not resumed it when all that dream was over ; and, seeing her sad eye and pale cheek, they had not urged it upon her. Nanny had grumbled, but only with her face buried in the cows' sides, and would not have

said a word about it to Hirell or Elias for the world.

This morning when Nanny went, gaping and rubbing her eyes, to where the two tin pails hung, she could not find them ; and was uttering one of her not very refined maledictions on the person who had moved them, when, glancing round, she saw them standing ready with the milk in them.

In her surprise she glanced up to the little deep square window, and saw there a face looking at her with a sweet expression—pensive, amused, penitent. The little hand, in which the chin rested, was red with its labour ; and the snowy forehead was moist under the half rings of auburn hair that had been ruffled against the cows' sides ; the hazel eyes looked deep, and full, and very bright.

As Nanny looked at that face her own became ennobled by a tender admiration and affection.

"Yes, yes!" she said in Welsh, with a rough fervour in her voice, "they did right to call you so, Hirell, Hirell!"

The head, set like a picture in the square

stone window-frame, shook gently, and a voice answered, also in Welsh—

“No, Nanny ; it is too holy a name for me. Angel ! ah, what must the real angels think of me for keeping it.”

“Nonsense, Miss Hirell-*bach*.”\* said Nanny, “they know fast enough you’ve as much right to it as they have ; and indeed more, for they know it’s more to your credit to stay here, where angels are so much needed, than to sit up there twanging their harps and hallelujahing all their time away. *You* not an angel ! Why what more *would* you do to be one ?”

“My work as I used to do it, for one thing, Nanny ; so mind you call me to-morrow, if I do not wake myself,” answered Hirell.

Then the face passed from the window—the beam of light was gone from before Nanny’s eyes.

It came upon Kezia next, as she stood looking in amazement at the breakfast all prepared and ready.

“Is anything wrong, Kezia ?” asked Hirell at the open door.

Kezia looked concerned—half frightened.

\* *Bach*—term of endearment.

"Hirell, dear, you should not do this," she said. "Your father, what would he say? he does not wish you to work hard; he will certainly be vexed."

"He is coming, Kezia; let us go and meet him."

Elias, returning from a far-away field where the plough was at work, saw them coming, and the bright fresh morning seemed to brighten and freshen still more. A sudden, light shower had dashed down, and been caught by the glorious sunshine, that made it look as if there had been a fall of jewels.

Hirell approached him laughing and shaking the wet from her hat.

"Why, father, what a lovely morning!" she said, with a sweet gaiety that filled Elias with joy. "The old year must be in its second childhood, for it's all tears and smiles, like April."

Elias said—

"Good morning, Hirell, God be with you." And repeated the same invariable morning greeting to Kezia.

They went on towards the house together,

Hirell's gaiety sobered as usual by her father's presence, but not destroyed.

Mr. Rymer was standing at the door watching the three as they approached. He had passed a restless night, and was for once thankful for the early habits of the house which enabled him to shorten the solitary self communing which had in this particular instance become almost unendurable.

The long breakfast-table had, perhaps, owing to Hirell's deft hands, a more than usually inviting air; or rather, a less than usually repellent one to Rymer. Hugh in the outer kitchen was mending a box to take with him to London; and Nanny was chattering to him, trying to make her voice heard above the din of his hammering. The sunshine was streaming into the passage through the open door; and with it a sweet sound like a voice singing, and coming nearer. Drawn by the sound, and the warmth of the sunshine, for he was chill with weariness and want of sleep, Mr. Rymer went to the door, and saw his landlord and the two women coming up the field.

The youngest walked a little in advance of

the others on the side nearest her father ; and was sending sweet peculiar notes, half plaintive, half joyous, up the bright, wet field before her. She was not walking trippingly, or as if any childish superabundance of spirits prevented her keeping pace with the others ; her step was elastic, eager, but quiet and even, and had more the gliding likeness of a spirit than mere youthful buoyancy.

As she approached near to the house and saw Mr. Rymer standing at the door, she fell back a little ; so that her father and Kezia might enter first.

The lodger received from each a characteristic glance and salutation. His host's look was brief and severe as his "good morning," Kezia's very gentle and full of humble solicitude at his pale altered face, but Hirell's eyes looked into his with the modest boldness of perfect indifference ; they were so open, so dewy, so unflinching, and unself-conscious, that the man's sad eyes gazed back into them as if they were as insensible of his gaze or its profound sadness, as two lovely flowers into whose depths it might comfort

him to look. It surprised him to see them fill suddenly with sweet human pity, and droop as Hirell passed him on the threshold.

After breakfast Mr. Rymer found himself sitting in his landlord's dull little room listening to a voice talking and singing by turns—in much the same mood as he had looked into Hirell Morgan's beautiful eyes. He listened to it without thinking of the owner. It deadened the sharp aching of his head to rest it against the wall by the window, and listen to the strange language uttered by the sweet, peculiar voice. It blended so perfectly with the scene on which he looked—the tender outlines, and shading of grand heights, and soft depths—the poor simple houses scattered here and there, looking so lowly and plain, as if the builder had feared to blot God's work by theirs, and had therefore done no more than necessity required.

Hirell's voice singing over her work in the outer kitchens seemed the very music of these things, at one moment high and clear, dying off in soft, faint indistinctness, like those ethereal mountain points, then falling into depths of rich, dreamy tenderness, sweet and

mysterious as seem the deep valleys in the distance ; then suddenly would sound the very keynote of sharp poverty—suffering, but enduring—patient, but pleading.

Mr. Rymer was not the only person at Bod Elian who listened to Hirell's voice just then ; Elias, harnessing his little rough-coated horse in the yard, heard her, and to him neither voice nor language was mysterious, but both impressibly touching and comforting ; for he drew from them the knowledge that he was not henceforth to toil on his stony path alone, but to have with him a bright, sweet presence, surrounding him with flowers and light.

How bravely she was striving ! For he knew that it was a matter of striving for Hirell to turn suddenly to these mean tasks from which she had thought herself for ever rescued. He knew this, even if her voice had not told him, as she toiled and sang.

She was packing the little market cart, and as she passed to and from it and the kitchen, she burst out with a little antique Welsh song, with such a yearning in her voice that Elias felt his misgivings return, till he looked



up and saw her bright face smiling as she dragged the heavy basket along and sang—

“Blithe is the bird who wings the plain,  
Nor sows, nor reaps a single grain ;  
Whose only labour is to sing  
Through summer, autumn, winter, spring.”

“Now, Nanny,” cried Hirell, as she returned and laid her hands on a heavier basket, “you must help me with this pork.” Then, in sudden alarm—“What are you doing?”

Nanny replied by holding up a potato and knife.

“Goodness sake, leave off!” commanded Hirell. “What do we want with them to-day, and father out, and Kezia making a bread-pudding?”

“Just a couple for the lodger—for the look of it, Miss Hirell-*bach*,” pleaded Nanny.

“Well, just a few ; but for goodness sake be careful, Nanny. How else *are* they to last the winter through?”

Nanny came and helped her lift the basket, and as they bore it to the cart Hirell went on with her song—

“At night his little nest he finds,  
Nor heeds what fare may next betide ;  
The change of season nought he minds,  
But for his wants lets Heaven provide.”

She held the shafts as her father and Nanny put the horse in, and in moving quickly, tore a long slit in her dress; and Elias, as he mounted and drove slowly over the rough ground, saw her looking down at it ruefully as she walked back to the house, singing the last verse of her song—

“Oft on the branch he perches gay,  
Oft on his painted wing looks he;  
And, penniless, renews his lay,  
Rejoicing in unbounded glee.”

END OF VOL. I.









